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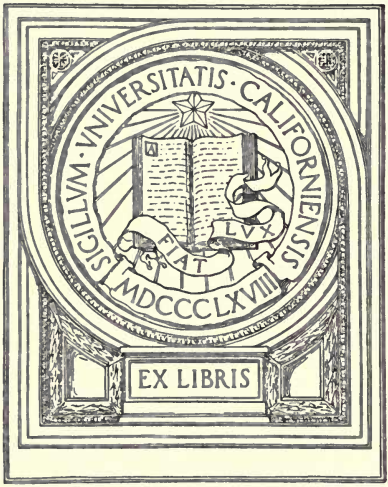

SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbiſhop of CANTERBURY.

Publiſhed from the original Manuſcripts,

By BEILBY PORTEUS D.D. and GEORGE STINTON D.D.

His Grace's Chaplains.

VOL VI.

LONDON,

Printed for J. and F. RIVINGTON, in St. Paul's Church-yard; and B. WHITE, at Horace's Head, in Fleet-Street.

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SERMON I.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by Inſpiration of God: and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs: that the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works.

MAN is by Nature ignorant and thoughtleſs: and therefore wants Information and Admonition. He is alſo prone to Evil, and averſe from Good: and therefore wants Reſtraint from the former, and Incitement to the latter. Without the Aſſiſtance, which we receive one from another in theſe Reſpects, we ſhould be wicked and wretched beyond Imagination. But though we ſhould be moſt defective in a State of Solitude, yet we are very deplorably ſo, even when joined to the beſt Advantage in Society. Many Points of the

utmoſt Moment, relating both to our preſent and future Condition, we either cannot diſcover at all, or not with Certainty: many, which we might, not even the wiſer, much leſs the greater Part, have in Fact known: and thoſe, which hardly any could fail to perceive, all have, more or leſs, failed to regard. Moſt of theſe Things are viſibly Mens own Fault: and the reſt are no Imputation upon God. For unqueſtionably he may with Juſtice place any of his Creatures in as low a State, both of Underſtanding and moral Ability, as he pleaſes: provided he requires from them, as he certainly will, only in Proportion to what he hath given. And even his infinite Goodneſs cannot oblige him to beſtow on them greater Favours, than his infinite Wiſdom ſees to be proper: which it is no Wonder ſhould act upon Reaſons, to Us unſearchable. But the leſs we have Ground to expect, the more thankfully we ought to receive whatever Notices, Encouragements or Warnings, he may vouchſafe more immediately from Himſelf.

Now we have in our Hands a Book, which we call the *Bible:* containing Accounts of various Communications made to Mankind by their Creator from the Beginning; but principally

pally through the Hands of *Moſes* and the Prophets; of *Jeſus Chriſt* and his Diſciples; together with great Numbers of moſt important Conſequences from thence reſulting. Both Parts of this Book are credibly affirmed to be written by Perſons, who muſt in the main have known the Truth or Falſehood of what they ſay: none of whom have given Grounds to ſuſpect their Veracity; but many, the ſtrongeſt poſſible Grounds to rely on it. They ſupport the Authority of the Doctrines and Precepts delivered there by expreſs Prophecies and public Miracles, recounted there alſo: which Prophecies have, moſt of them, undeniably been ſince fulfilled, nor do any appear to have failed; and which Miracles, though they could never have been acknowledged if they had not been real, were, ſo far as we can learn, denied by no one, either at the Time when they were ſaid to be done, or long after. On the contrary, the Old Teſtament hath always been admitted, as true and genuine, by the whole Jewiſh nation: and the Pentateuch in particular, uſed as the Law of their Country; though it appoints more Things than one to be done, ſo utterly and viſibly contrary to human Policy, that they muſt proceed from Him,

whoſe extraordinary Providence alone could make them practicable with Safety; and others, too contrary to human Inclinations, for Men to have choſen, without being ſure that God required them. And as to the Writers of the New Teſtament, it is ſtill more certain, that their Works were publiſhed near the Time and in the Places, where they affirm the Events, which they relate, came to paſs: that they agree ſurpriſingly well, though in general they were unlearned Perſons, and plainly had not concerted their Story together: that they led pious and virtuous Lives: that they were willing to ſuffer Death for the Sake of their Teſtimony. And accordingly the whole Chriſtian Church from its Riſe embraced their Narrations with a Faith, which neither Artifice nor Perſecution were able to overturn, or keep it from prevailing throughout the World, though contrary to the favourite Notions and vicious Deſires of all Mankind: which alone is a Proof, that the Facts related in them, even the moſt miraculous, were previouſly known to be true; and the Doctrines the ſame, which had been already taught by the Apoſtles: elſe Jews, Heathens and Chriſtians muſt have exclaimed againſt the Authors, as Publiſhers of Falſehoods,

hoods, and they could never have obtained Credit. Some few of their Books indeed, (but ſuch as taught no one Article that is not in the others, nor denied any one that is) were queſtioned in ſome Congregations for a good while, perhaps with more Caution than needed: but were then put on a Level with the reſt. Neither Teſtament is pretended to be diſproved, but both are confirmed, as far as could be expected, by ſuch Heathen Records as are extant: and if either had been confuted formerly by any, that are now loſt, it muſt have ſunk; which hath not been the Caſe. Each of them furniſhes powerful internal Evidence in Favour of itſelf: each adds manifold Strength to the other: and no Writings whatever ſtand on the Credit of ſuch numerous and deciſive Atteſtations.

Were we therefore to conſider them merely as Compoſitions of excellent Men, well informed, and faithfully informing Us, in the beſt Manner they could, of what it moſt concerns us to know, we muſt allow them to be a moſt valuable Bleſſing; a Treaſure unſpeakably ſuperior to all the other Remains of Antiquity. But this is much too low an Eſteem of them: they were written moreover under the eſpecial

Direction of Heaven, and that for an End no leſs important, than a full Supply of our ſpiritual Wants. Theſe two Points the Apoſtle aſſerts plainly in the Text: and I ſhall endeavour to confirm and improve his Aſſertions, by ſhewing, in ſome Diſcourſes upon it,

I. That all Scripture is of Divine Authority.

II. That it completely anſwers every Purpoſe of Religion.

III. That we ought to read and ſtudy it diligently.

IV. How we may do this to the beſt Effect.

I. That *all Scripture is* of divine Authority, or, in St. *Paul*'s Language, *given by Inſpiration of God:* a Poſition extremely requiſite to be underſtood in its true Senſe, and eſtabliſhed on its proper Foundation. For ſome have held it to ſignify, that every Sentence and Word was dictated from above: and conſequently have made Room, without intending it, for as many plauſible Objections, as there are Appearances of any Thing, which in reſpect of Clearneſs, Elegance, Order, Strength, exceeds not human Power, or falls beneath abſolute Perfection. Others, eſpecially of late Years, partly to guard againſt this Danger, and partly to excuſe Notions of their own, which are contrary

trary to Scripture, have imagined, that being inſpired meant little more (at leaſt in Relation to the Hiſtorical and Doctrinal Books) than being indued with a large Meaſure of general pious Intention: ſo that, continuing to call themſelves Chriſtians, and profeſſing a high Reſpect for the ſacred Writers as good Men, they have thought themſelves juſtified in doubting, or even diſbelieving, almoſt as much as they pleaſe, of what the Scriptures teach.

To ſtate therefore and defend the Senſe of the Text, I ſhall begin with explaining the Terms. The Word, here tranſlated *Scripture*, denotes frequently in other Authors any Writing whatever. Whence ſome ancient Verſions render the Original thus: *Every Writing, given by Inſpiration of God, is profitable*, and ſo forth: leaving it undetermined, which are ſo given. But always, in the Goſpels and Epiſtles, it denotes that Collection of Writings, which the Church acknowledged for its Rule of Life and Manners. When our Apoſtle ſent this Epiſtle to *Timothy*, ſeveral Parts of the New Teſtament were not publiſhed, and ſcarce any had ſpread very far: ſo that he muſt by *Scripture* mean chiefly, if not ſolely, the Old Teſtament. But the Books of the New, from their firſt Ap-

pearance, obtained the ſame Title every where. St. *Peter* gives it by the plaineſt Implication to what St. *Paul* wrote[a]: and doubtleſs what He, and the reſt of the twelve, wrote, equally deſerved it. Inſpiration is any particular Influence of God on the Mind: whence we pray in the Communion Service, that he would *cleanſe our Hearts by the Inſpiration of his Holy Spirit*. But, in the Caſe before us, it muſt ſignify ſuch Influence, as will be effectual for the Purpoſe of writing ſuch Books. And of this there may be various Degrees requiſite, and therefore granted, according to the Variety of Circumſtances. Moving a Perſon inwardly to undertake the Work is one Degree. Superintending him during the Execution of it, ſo as to preſerve him from any conſiderable Miſtake or Omiſſion, is another. Preſerving him from all, even the leaſt, is a higher ſtill. Enabling him to expreſs himſelf in a Manner loftier, clearer, more convincing or more affecting, than he could have done otherwiſe, is yet a further Step. Suggeſting to him alſo the Matter, which he ſhall deliver, goes beyond the former, eſpecially if he was unacquainted with it till then. And putting into his Mouth the very

[a] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

Words

Words he ſhall uſe, is the completeſt Guidance, that can be.

Now we ſay not, that God hath done all theſe Things in every Part of Scripture: but ſo many in each, as were needful. That He directed *Moſes* to write his Laws [b], and *Iſaiah* [c], and *Ezekiel* [d] and *Habakkuk* [e], Part at leaſt of their Prophecies, and *Jeremiah* the Whole of his [f], and St. *John* the Book of Revelation [g], they themſelves poſitively aſſure us: and by Parity of Reaſon we may preſume it concerning the reſt: nor can we doubt, but that, writing in Obedience to his Command, they wrote ſo, as he approved. On ſome Occaſions perhaps they wanted, and therefore had, no extraordinary Aſſiſtance. Without this, the Hiſtorians amongſt them might relate ſeveral Facts from their own perſonal Knowledge, others from authentic Records: and *Moſes* might receive his Accounts of the earlieſt Ages from undoubted Tradition. For Tradition was much longer credible, when there were but few Things to commit to Memory, and there was no other Way of preſerving them, and two or

[b] Exod. xxxiv. 27. Comp. xxiv. 4. Deut. xxxi. 9, 22.
[c] Iſ. viii. 1. xxx. 8. [d] Ezek. xliii. 11. [e] Hab. ii. 2.
[f] Jer. xxx. 2. xxxvi. 2, 28. [g] Rev. i. 11, 19.

three

three Generations lasted many Centuries. The Writers of the *Psalms* might often chuse their own Subjects, and treat them suitably to their own Genius. The wise King, and other Compilers of the *Proverbs*, might perpetuate their own Maxims. The Authors of the Epistles may well be supposed to have given the many small Directions, which we find in them, solely from the Dictates of their own Prudence. The Authors of all the Books might be trusted very commonly to use their own Stile and Method, (in which accordingly there is much Diversity) nay, even their own Illustrations, Arguments and Reasonings, on the Points before them. And yet, amidst all this, the watchful Eye of God might sufficiently provide against their misleading into Error and Sin, or omitting to instruct in any Thing essential, those, whom they were appointed *to make wise unto Salvation*[b].

That he hath superintended them thus far, is evident from the Necessity of his doing it. The Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian Revelations, which are contained, with their principal Evidences, in these Books, could not be known with Certainty otherwise than by Means

[b] 2 Tim. iii. 15.

of

of them, after ſome Time, though they might at firſt by Word of Mouth. And therefore to prevent his gracious Intention towards every ſucceeding Generation from being fruſtrated, undoubtedly God would take Care, that the Scripture ſhould teach us infallibly what he required us to believe and do: which was impoſſible, if his Truths and the Imaginations of his Creatures were blended in them promiſcuouſly: or indeed, if they were only left to expreſs themſelves as they could, properly or improperly, concerning abſtruſe and difficult Matters, (as there are many ſuch in the ſacred Writings,) where a ſmall Error in their Phraſe might occaſion a great one in our Belief or Conduct. For on this Suppoſition, how ſhould we diſtinguiſh with Safety in Matters of ſuch Moment: and where ſhall they, who reject any one Article, find a ſure Place to ſtop at? Fatal Experience hath proved continually, that they can find none. And conſequently our wiſe and good Maker would effectually preſerve Writings of ſuch infinite Importance, not only from groſs Errors, but from the very ſmalleſt in Faith or Practice, and, one ſhould think, in Arguings and Facts alſo: the former being often affected by the latter.

But

But this is not all: he muſt have interpoſed much farther. We find Paſſages throughout, ſo ſublime, ſo pathetic, full of ſuch Energy and Force upon the Heart and Conſcience; yet without the leaſt Appearance of Labour and Study for that Purpoſe: indeed the Deſign of the Whole is ſo noble, ſo well ſuited to the ſad Condition of human Kind; the Morals have in them ſuch Purity and Dignity; the Doctrines are many of them ſo much above Reaſon, yet all of them ſo reconcileable with it; the Expreſſion is ſo majeſtic, yet familiariſed with ſuch eaſy Simplicity; that the more we read and ſtudy theſe Books with pious Diſpoſitions and judicious Attention, the more we ſhall ſee and feel of the Hand of God in them; and without fixing diſtinctly on this or that Text, be fully ſatisfied in the Groſs, that no mere Men, and yet leſs unlearned Men, as ſeveral of the Writers were, could ever approach to ſuch Perfection, (far ſuperior to that of the moſt admired Heathens,) without being raiſed vaſtly above themſelves by ſupernatural Aid. But then if we conſider alſo the accurate Agreement and Correſpondence of the ſeveral Parts, though of very different Natures, written at very different Times, under very different Diſpenſations of

Religion, and Scenes of worldly Affairs; that, numerous and various as they are, they unite nevertheleſs into one conſiſtent and connected Scheme, and the more evidently ſo, the ſtricter Inquiry is made into it; this will greatly ſtrengthen the Proof of divine Suggeſtions, as well as Reſtraints. For ſuch Harmony muſt proceed from one original Plan, formed in the Mind of God, Portions of which only were communicated to the ſeveral Publiſhers of it; yet each of them was influenced from above to ſo punctual an Execution of his reſpective Truſt, that what he ſaid, perfectly tallied with what he was ignorant of, till at length the whole was completed by our bleſſed Redeemer; *in whom all the Building, fitly framed together, grew up into a holy Temple in the Lord*[1].

But after this general View, let us enter into ſome Particulars. The *Moſaic* Law, if at all from God, was dictated by God: for it affirms itſelf to be ſo. The Contents of the prophetic Books are, Predictions of future Events, and Commiſſions to deliver ſuch and ſuch Inſtructions to the People. Theſe alſo, if true, (as the Completions of the former demonſtrate that they were,) muſt have been ſuggeſted. One of the Prophets declares,

[1] Eph. ii. 21.

that

that *he heard, but underſtood not* [k]. Others of them St. *Peter* deſcribes, as *diligently ſearching* into the Times and Circumſtances, to which their Meſſages related [l]. And probably they all apprehended the Meaning of a great Part of them but imperfectly. Now we may be certain, that God would effectually incline them to deliver theſe, by uſing the very Words, which they received. And in the reſt they would of Courſe endeavour it, and have their Memories undoubtedly ſtrengthened, as far as needed, to perform it. Some Revelations indeed were made to them, not by Words, but by viſible Appearances, or Impreſſions on their Imagination. Here again we cannot queſtion, but they were enabled to relate them in proper Terms. Farther yet: many of the *Pſalms* are plainly prophetical, and even the Hiſtorical Books contain Prophecies: theſe alſo muſt have been ſuggeſted from above. The very Hiſtories are, ſome of them, ſuch as Man could not know, ſome ſuch, as in all Likelihood the Writers did not know, of themſelves, or from other Men: therefore God muſt have communicated them too. And from the Beginning to the End of Scripture are ſuch Numbers of Things of ſuch

[k] Dan. xii. 8. [l] 1 Pet. i. 11.

exalted

exalted Excellency, that we may well ſay of the Writer, concerning each of them, as our Saviour doth to St. *Peter: Fleſh and Blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in Heaven*[m].

However, as we Chriſtians are moſt immediately concerned with the New Teſtament, and proving its divine Authority ſingly will prove that of the Old, which is every where aſſerted in it, I ſhall dwell upon this Point more largely.

The Evangeliſts give us not only a circumſtantial Account of our Saviour's Journies, Miracles, Sufferings, Reſurrection, but frequent Narrations of his Diſcourſes likewiſe: ſome of them very long, all of them together making up near half the Goſpels; and St. *John*, who wrote the laſt, hath the moſt of them. We, who have heard and read them frequently, were we now to read one of the larger again, ſhould ſcarce be able to repeat it, without conſiderable Omiſſions, nay without Variations altering the Senſe. The Diſciples at the Time were far from comprehending them all: it is no where affirmed, that they wrote any of them down, till ſeveral Years after: probably ſome

[m] Matt. xvi. 17.

of

of the Gospels were not published within twenty or thirty Years or more. Yet a small Failure in representing the Doctrine of their Master, his Vindications of himself, his Predictions of future Events, nay, any Thing of Moment, that he did or that befell him, (especially considering how many Things were foretold concerning him) might have been extremely detrimental to Christianity. And therefore assuredly they would never have dared to specify such a Variety of Particulars, both said and done; or if they had, could never have agreed so well in them, without supernatural Assistance. But they well knew, they should have it.

Our Saviour, before his Death, promised them, that *the Holy Ghost should teach them all Things, and bring all Things to their Remembrance, whatsoever he had said to them*[n], and *guide them into all Truth*[o]. He assured them, *it was expedient for them, that he should go away*, because, till then, he could not, consistently with the Purposes of infinite Wisdom, send the Spirit to them[p]: whence it must follow, that by the Aid of the Spirit, they were as secure from Error, as if they had (what after they were dispersed to preach the Gospel

[n] John xiv. 26. [o] John xvi. 13. [p] John xvi. 7.

was

was impoſſible) Chriſt bodily preſent with them, to aſk concerning the Things which they had heard or ſeen. He told them farther, that when they ſhould *be brought before Governors and Kings to bear Teſtimony* for him, *it ſhould be given them, in that ſame Hour, what they ſhould ſpeak: for*, ſaith he, *it is not ye that ſpeak, but the Spirit of your Father, which ſpeaketh in you*[q]. To pretend, that this Promiſe means only Courage and Preſence of Mind, is contrary to all Reaſon, and all Uſe of Scripture Language. And if it means, as it evidently doth, divine Superintendence; they certainly wanted, and therefore would have, at leaſt as much of it, when they wrote Books, which God foreſaw (whether They did or not) muſt be the only ſtanding Rule of Chriſtian Faith for ever, as when they ſpoke occaſionally before this or that Heathen Magiſtrate.

The Aſſurances, which he vouchſafed to them, we read, were fully made good. After his Reſurrection he ſaid to them, *As the Father hath ſent me, even ſo ſend I you: then he breathed on them, and ſaid, Receive ye the Holy Ghoſt*[r]. After his Aſcenſion, they were filled with his

[q] Matt. x. 18, 19, 20. Comp. Luke xii. 11, 12. [r] John xx. 21, 22.

Gifts yet more abundantly, *ſpake with other Tongues, as the Spirit gave them Utterance*[t]; diſcerned the Secrets of Mens Hearts, foretold Things to come, performed the very greateſt of Miracles, had frequent Revelations from above, ſeem to have done nothing of Moment without an eſpecial Guidance. Surely then, they, who were thus under God's Direction, did not write the New Teſtament without it: they who confirmed in this Manner what they taught, were not capable of leaving unmentioned any fundamental Truth, and yet leſs of teaching any Error.

Now two of theſe, *Matthew* and *John*, Apoſtles and Companions of our Lord, are alſo Evangeliſts. The latter was peculiarly beloved of our Saviour while on Earth, and afterwards ſaw in Viſion and heard from his Mouth, and that of an Angel, all that is contained in the Book of *Revelation:* whence we not only infer its infallible Authority, but are ſtrongly confirmed in our Belief, that the Spirit of *Jeſus* was preſent with him in writing his Goſpel and Epiſtles alſo. The two other Evangeliſts indeed, *Mark* and *Luke*, were not Apoſtles: but their Works were approved by St. *Peter* and St.

[t] Acts ii. 4.

Paul,

Paul, who were: and all the four Gospels have ever been held in equal Esteem. The Book of *Acts* is a Sequel of the third, which the Writer would not fail to lay before the same Apostle, who had inspected his Gospel: especially as it principally relates to him, and ends at the Time when they were together at *Rome*, and at full Leisure to revise it jointly.

It is true, St. *Paul* himself was not one of the twelve. But *he was not a whit behind the the very chiefest of them*[s]; being miraculously called to *see that just One, to hear the Voice of his Mouth*[t], and to *receive* his Gospel, *not of Man, but by the* immediate *Revelation of Jesus Christ*[u]. Certainly then he was not suffered either to misrepresent or suppress any Part of it, whether speaking or writing, or to deliver any Thing, as comprehended in it, which was not. But let us hear what he saith of his own Preaching. *We speak the Things given unto us of God, not in the Words, which Man's Wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*[w]. *When ye received the Word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it, not as the Word of Men, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God*[x]. Let us hear

[s] 2 Cor. xi. 5. [t] Acts xxii. 14. [u] Gal. i. 12.
[w] 1 Cor. ii. 12, 13. [x] 1 Thess. ii. 13.

what he ſaith of his own Epiſtles. *If any Man think himſelf a Prophet or Spiritual,* that is, indued with ſupernatural Gifts, *let him acknowledge, that the Things, which I write unto you, are the Commandments of the Lord* [y]. *He therefore, that deſpiſeth, deſpiſeth not Man, but God, who hath alſo given unto us his holy Spirit* [z]. Yet we may be confident, *that he did not boaſt of himſelf beyond his Meaſure* [a], or *dare to ſpeak of any Thing, which Chriſt had not wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient, by Word and Deed, by mighty Signs and Wonders, by the Power of the Spirit of God* [b]. And obſerve, he doth not, after all this, any where exalt himſelf above the other Apoſtles: but he places all the Apoſtles above the Prophets [c]: which likewiſe in Effect St. *Peter* doth, when having firſt exhorted Chriſtians to *be mindful of the Words, which were ſpoken before by the holy Prophets,* he adds, in yet ſtronger Terms, and *of the Commandment of us, the Apoſtles of the Lord and Saviour* [d]. St. *John* alſo, in his firſt Epiſtle, uſes Language, in general, of the ſame high Import. *He that knoweth God, heareth us: he that is not of God, heareth not*

[y] 1 Cor. xiv. 37. [z] 1 Theſſ. iv. 8. [a] 2 Cor. x. 13.
[b] Rom. xv. 18, 19. [c] 1 Cor. xii. 28. [d] 2 Pet. iii. 2.

us. Hereby know we the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit of Error[e]. Could ſuch eminent Saints, could any religious and humble, or commonly honeſt, Men, provoke God, and attempt to deceive their Fellow Creatures, by making ſuch Claims as theſe, without Foundation? Would not he inſtantly have withdrawn his Gifts from them? Would not their Enviers and Rivals, for ſuch there were, have expoſed them? Would not all Chriſtians by common Conſent have rejected them? Certainly they would: yet certainly they did juſt the contrary.

The only two Writers of the New Teſtament, whom I have not yet named particularly, are St. *James* and St. *Jude*: of whom it may be very ſufficient to obſerve, that they were both Apoſtles, and near Kinſmen of our Lord, and therefore might well expect the ſame Regard with the reſt; which, by the whole Tenour of their Epiſtles, they appear to do, though without demanding it ſo expreſsly, for which they had probably no Occaſion.

Still we acknowledge, that ſome Chriſtians at *Antioch* diſputed one Part of what *Paul* and *Barnabas* taught there: and afterwards, when the Apoſtles held a Council at *Jeruſalem* upon it,

[e] 1 John iv. 6.

certain *Pharisees*, who were Believers, debated the same Point[f]. But no Wonder, if new Converts, full of old Prejudices, were backward to part with them, where the Honour of the Law seemed to be impaired by it, considering how obstinately refractory their Forefathers had been to known Prophets, and to *Moses* himself. However, being with great Condescension heard, then instructed by St. *James* and St. *Peter*, they submitted. Yet, we own farther, in the Decree made on this Occasion, where the Apostles say, *It hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us*, they join the Elders and Brethren with them. But so doth St. *Paul* join one or other with Him in no less than eight of his Epistles[g]: and in both Cases the Meaning plainly is, not to allow them equal Authority, but merely to express their Concurrence.

Indeed the Apostles themselves were not led into all Truth at once: but this is very consistent with being secured from any Error. They were also liable to act imprudently: as St. *Peter* did, when he separated himself from the *Gentiles* at *Antioch*, fearing to offend the be-

[f] Acts xv. 1, &c. [g] 1 Cor. i. 1. 2 Cor. i. 1. Gal. i. 1, 2. Phil. i. 1. Col. i. 1. 1 Thess. i. 1. 2 Thess. i. 1. Philem. ver. 1.

lieving

lieving *Jews*, for which St. *Paul* blamed him [h]; and as perhaps even *Paul* too did, when not knowing the High Prieſt, he reproved him ſo ſeverely, though deſervedly [i]. But there was not the leaſt Falſehood aſſerted by either: and the Behaviour of both turned to the Advantage of Chriſtianity. Some have objected to the Inſpiration of the latter, that in one Place he only ſaith, *He thinks he hath the Spirit of God* [k]. But this ironical ſeeming Doubt was deſigned to imply the ſtrongeſt Affirmation, and to put his Adverſaries to Shame. They object alſo, that in the ſame Chapter he diſtinguiſhes the Directions, which Chriſt had given in Perſon, from his own [l]. And He doth ſo: but what is this more, than a moſt amiable Expreſſion of Humility, and Reſpect to his dear Lord? A few Perſons have likewiſe apprehended, that when he ſaith to the *Corinthians*, *We ſhall not all ſleep, but we ſhall all be changed* [m], and again to the *Theſſalonians*, *For this we ſay unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord, ſhall not prevent*, go to Heaven before, *thoſe which are aſleep* [n]; he meant, that the general Reſur-

[h] Gal. ii. 11, &c. [i] Acts xxiii. 2, &c. [k] 1 Cor. vii. 40. [l] 1 Cor. vii. 12. [m] 1 Cor. xv. 51. [n] 1 Theſſ. iv. 15.

rection was to be in his Days, and therefore erred. But plainly he did not: for in his ſecond Epiſtle to the latter, written the ſame Year, he cautions them againſt miſunderſtanding, (as it ſeems they ſome of them had done,) what he ſaid on that Head in his firſt: and mentions Things, which were to intervene between his own Days and the Reſurrection, and muſt take up Time [o]. In other Epiſtles too, he ſpeaks of his own dying, firſt as likely [p], then as certain to happen ſoon [q]. And therefore by *We*, in the Places objected, he meant only in general, We, or ſuch of us, Chriſtians: not deſigning to intimate, that He himſelf ſhould be one of the Number. In this Senſe he frequently uſes both, *We*, and even, *I*, elſewhere, as many approved Authors have done in different Nations and Ages.

Objections have been raiſed againſt various Paſſages of holy Writ, beſides the above-mentioned. Some have been thought hard to reconcile with the moral Attributes of God: ſome with each other. To examine them here particularly would be much too long. General Obſervations, capable, I hope, of removing or obviating the principal Difficulties, eſpecially of

[o] 2 Theſſ. ii. 1, &c. [p] Phil. i. 20. [q] 2 Tim. iv. 6.

the

the former Sort, ſhall, God willing, be made in the Sequel of theſe Diſcourſes. But without doing that, it might be ſufficient to ſay, that reaſonable Anſwers have been already given to them: that many of them, which once appeared to be of the greateſt Importance, have been fully ſhewn to be of none: from whence alone we may juſtly preſume, that whatever is wanting to clear up the reſt will be ſupplied in Time by the Bleſſing of God on the continued Labours of pious and learned Men: and that in the mean while, inſtead of thinking ill of the Scriptures, we ought to think humbly of ourſelves, and be perſuaded, that in theſe Points we do not underſtand them[r].

Such, as were moſt eminent for Piety and Knowledge, and have enjoyed the greateſt Advantages for judging of Scripture, have always eſteemed it of divine Original. The Chriſtians of the firſt and ſecond Centuries, who muſt have known perſonally, whether the Books of the New Teſtament were authentic, who had been Companions of the Apoſtles and their immediate Succeſſors, who muſt have been taught by Them, what Honour both Teſtaments deſerved, and would have been reſtrained by Them from

[r] This laſt is Juſtin Martyr's Rule, Dial. with Trypho, § 65.

paying

paying them too much, paid them the very higheſt. All, who came after, exalted them above the moſt valuable Compoſitions of the moſt early Fathers, by the ſtrongeſt Expreſſions of peculiar Regard: and this Regard was univerſal. None but the abſurdeſt and vileſt of Heretics refuſed, and that on the pooreſt Pretences, to be tried by their Authority. All others, whatever elſe they differed in, agreed in acknowledging the Infallibility of the Bible, to which they were forced to attempt reconciling their Tenets, as well as they could. In later Days, we confeſs, Papiſts have ſpoken ſlightly of it, and Libertines much worſe: both however for bad Reaſons; becauſe it condemns the religious Notions and Practices of the former, and the irreligious ones of the latter. But all unprejudiced and ſerious Men, in Proportion to their natural Abilities, acquired Knowledge, and Attention to ſtudy it, have held it to this Day in Reverence: and in Proportion as that Reverence hath influenced their Hearts and Lives, have been Examples and Bleſſings to all around them.

Let us therefore walk in their Steps, and be heartily thankful; firſt, that God hath not left us (undeſerving Wretches as we are) to our own

own Conjectures and Imaginations concerning what we are to believe and to do, to hope and to fear, but made gracious Diſcoveries of Himſelf, his Will and Purpoſes, to Mankind; then, that he hath not left theſe Diſcoveries to come down to us, and our Poſterity, through the uncertain Conveyance of oral Tradition, which quickly fails, or of caſual Writers, who might err in ſome Points neceſſary, and paſs by others unmentioned; but hath excited fit Perſons to record his Truths; exalted their Faculties, and ſtrengthened their Memories, where it was needful; ſuggeſted to them many Things, watched over them in all. Let us receive their Communications with the utmoſt Reſpect, and read them with the utmoſt Care, as the Means of our Salvation: and if amidſt a great deal, that is highly uſeful and incomparably excellent, we meet ſometimes with Things, for which we are unable to account; let us indeed ſeek for Solutions diligently, and be willing to admit any fair, any poſſible one, rather than a Miſtake in the ſacred Writings: but though we ſhould meet with no Solution, let us conſider, that humble Faith becomes us much better, than haughty Contradiction; modeſt Suſpenſe, than raſh Poſitiveneſs: for that God knows every

every Thing, and we know little; that others perhaps now, and we ourſelves after farther Inquiry, may ſee very diſtinctly what at preſent we ſee not at all; and, (which alone may ſuffice to our Satisfaction) that whatever elſe may be dark or doubtful, or ſeem exceptionable, there is abundantly enough, clearly and indiſputably written, to anſwer the End of all; that *we may believe, that Jeſus is the Chriſt the Son of God, and that believing we may have Life through his Name*[a].

[a] John xx. 31.

SER-

SERMON II.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by Inſpiration of God: and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs: that the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works.

I. IN my preceding Diſcourſe I proved to you the Divine Authority of Scripture; and now go on, as was propoſed, to ſhew

II. Its complete Uſefulneſs. This the Apoſtle hath expreſſed by ſaying, it *is profitable for Doctrine*, or teaching religious Truths; for *Reproof*, or Confutation of the oppoſite Notions and Practices; *for Correction*, that is, Amendment of thoſe, whom it reproves; *for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs*, that is, leading good

good Perſons on to ſtill higher Degrees of Perfection.

Had the Writers of it been left to themſelves, yet being worthy Men, and well informed of what they wrote, it would have been extremely uſeful. But as they were ſuperintended by the Spirit of God, it muſt be unſpeakably more ſo: in particular, becauſe we may with abſolute Security rely on it in all Points. Whatever it teaches, we may ſafely learn; and it teaches the whole of Chriſtianity; the Hiſtorical Facts, the Articles of Faith, the Rules of Life, the Promiſes, the Threatenings, the Exhortations, the Examples. From Scripture chiefly, and almoſt ſolely, we come to know, that God is infinitely perfect, and made the World; that Man is fallen and redeemed; that he hath eternal Happineſs or Miſery ſet before him; and what the Means are of procuring the one, and avoiding the other. For Reaſon could diſcover but little of theſe Things, and did diſcover much leſs: and Tradition is unable to convey any Thing far down with Certainty. In this narrow Compaſs lies the Proof, and it is a complete Proof, of the Benefits that we may receive from holy Writ. However it hath graciouſly condeſcended to invite

invite Us to partake of them, by ſpecifying them more diſtinctly. I ſhall only mention a few of thoſe, which are enumerated in one Pſalm, the 119th. You will judge from thence of the reſt. *Wherewithal ſhall a young Man cleanſe his Way? Even by ruling himſelf after thy Word*[a]. *Thy Words have I hid within my Heart, that I might not ſin againſt thee*[b]. *Thy Teſtimonies are my Delight and my Counſellors*[c]. *So ſhall I have wherewith to anſwer him, that reproacheth me: for I truſt in thy Word*[d]. *I will walk at Liberty, for I ſeek thy Commandments*[e]. *Thy Statutes have been my Songs in the Houſe of my Pilgrimage*[f]. *The Law of thy Mouth is dearer unto me, than Thouſands of Gold and Silver*[g]. *If my Delight had not been in thy Law, I ſhould have periſhed in my Trouble*[h]. *Through thy Commandment I get Underſtanding: therefore I hate all evil Ways*[i]. *Thy Word is a Lamp unto my Feet, and a Light unto my Paths*[k]. *Thy Teſtimonies have I claimed as mine Heritage for ever: and why? they are the very Joy of my Heart*[l]. *Great Peace have they, which love thy Law, and nothing ſhall offend them*[m].

[a] v. 9. [b] v. 11. [c] v. 24. [d] v. 42. [e] v. 45. [f] v. 54. [g] v. 72. [h] v. 92. [i] v. 104. [k] v. 105. [l] v. 111. [m] v. 165.

Theſe

Theſe and many other Advantages, which the inſpired Writings aſcribe to themſelves, are alſo in Reaſon to be expected from them; the Authors had experienced them; all pious Men have experienced them ſince; every one, that will, may at this Hour. And therefore I ſhall enlarge no farther at preſent on the direct Evidence of them; but proceed to anſwer the Objections of thoſe, who are hindered by unjuſt Prepoſſeſſions from trying them: who either conteſt the Uſefulneſs of Scripture, in order to overturn its Authority; or, which is wonderfully inconſiſtent, think very lowly of the former, while they acknowledge the latter. For I fear many entertain injurious Opinions of the Word of God, without daring to own it, even to themſelves: which influence them powerfully, though ſecretly, firſt to read, then to eſteem it, leſs and leſs; then to indulge a Life unſuitable to it, and perhaps in the laſt Place to reject it entirely. Theſe enſnaring Sentiments therefore I ſhall plainly bring forth into your View without Diſguiſe, and confute them; that you may have Anſwers ready to the bad Suggeſtions of other Men, or your own Minds.

It is ſaid then, that theſe Books are not in our own Language, but in Tranſlations, which moſt

moſt of us muſt take upon Truſt, and which often differ. But have Men the leaſt Pretence to ſay, that God ſhall not inſtruct them, unleſs he will convey his Inſtructions to them in all the ſeveral Tongues of the ſeveral Countries and Ages of the World? Is it not better, that he ſhould give them in any one, than in none? Are we not informed by Tranſlations of the moſt important Events, that have paſſed formerly upon Earth? Do not moſt of the Subjects of ſome large Empires to this Day learn the Will of their Sovereign from Tranſlations? And what if the Tranſlations of ſome Parts of Scripture vary? They agree in the Main: and there can be no groſs Impoſitions; becauſe the Clergy of one Communion will be ſure to detect thoſe of others in ſuch Attempts; and there are Multitudes of learned Laity alſo in Lands of Freedom; and it is the common Intereſt of all Perſons not to be deceived.

It is ſaid further, that one ſhould expect a Book, written by Direction from God for inſtructing the World in Religion, to be a ſhort plain methodical Syſtem of Belief and Practice, unincumbered with any other Matters: and the Bible is quite a different Thing. But is not

the whole Syſtem of Nature, and the whole Conduct of Providence, quite a different Thing from what one ſhould have expected? Had we been ſet to imagine before-hand, what Sort of a World God would create, and in what Manner he would govern it; we ſhould none of us have pitched on ſuch a Creation and Government, as we ſee in fact: but had the Scheme of either come into our Thoughts, we ſhould probably have fancied there were innumerable and inſuperable Objections againſt it. And hence we ſhould learn, that, in the Caſe of Revelation alſo, our Fancies are not the Meaſure of God's Proceedings; but we are humbly to acquieſce in whatever it appears by proper Evidence that he hath done, and not erect ourſelves into Judges of what he ought to do, or in what Manner. Hear his own Words: *My Thoughts are not your Thoughts, neither are your Ways my Ways, ſaith the Lord. For as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, ſo are my Ways higher than your Ways, and my Thoughts than your Thoughts*[a]. The Proceedings of Divine Wiſdom will always juſtify themſelves to human Inquiry, ſo

[a] Iſ. lv. 8, 9.

far

far as we are capable of comprehending them. But of Neceſſity many of God's Actions muſt be infinitely more beyond our Reach, than the Actions of a prudent Man are beyond that of a little Child. And were the whole Plan of Scripture ſuch, as in our firſt crude Notions we ſhould have conceived likely; that very Circumſtance would have furniſhed a Preſumption againſt it: whereas now we have Cauſe to look on it with that Reverence, which the Pſalmiſt expreſſes: *Thy Teſtimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my Soul keep them*[o]. However let us enter a little more particularly into the Merits of this Plea.

The Inſtruction given us in the Bible, we are told, is not ranged in a juſt Method: but we are to pick out the Doctrines and Precepts of it often from the Midſt of Hiſtories and Prophecies, and put them together as we can. But is not the natural Inſtruction, which God gives us, juſt of the ſame Sort? Are we not obliged to gather almoſt the Whole of it, from Hints and Intimations afforded by Objects diſperſed through the Earth: from Obſervations, Experiments and Reaſonings of Perſons, who have lived in different Countries and Ages? Yet

[o] Pſ. cxix. 129.

theſe are undeniably the Means, which he hath appointed to furniſh us with one Part of our Knowledge. And why then may not the Scripture, notwithſtanding its apparent Want of Order, be the Means, which he hath appointed to furniſh us with another Part? It is alledged yet farther, that ſome very curious and intereſting Things are entirely omitted, or but briefly hinted there: while ſome very obvious ones are inculcated, and repeated without End. But curious Things are Part of them probably unfit to be known perfectly at preſent: and we may well be content to *ſee now through a Glaſs darkly*, ſince hereafter we ſhall ſee *Face to Face*[p]. Again, ſuch of them, as may properly be known, are uſeful in Compariſon to few; who alſo will ſeek after them with more Spirit, and diſcover them with more Joy, when they muſt *ſearch for them as for hid Treaſures*[q]: whereas plain Things are uſeful for all; and therefore ſhould be eaſily found: for moſt Minds cannot labour. Beſides, conſider how it is in worldly Things: look around you: are not Matters of ſmall Price, but great Utility, the commoneſt? And muſt not they, who will have Things that are curious and rare, ſeek after

[p] Prov. ii. 4. [q] 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

them

them with Difficulty, and pay dear for them? Farther, had every Thing in the Bible been eaſy of Acceſs to us, in proportion as we were likely to place a Value upon it; we ſhould ſoon have looked it through, then have laid it down, and ſeldom taken it up again: whereas now we return to it over and over, in freſh Hopes of diſcovering ſomething more: and at each Reading, we meet, whether we will or not, with the commoneſt indeed, but moſt neceſſary Doctrines and Precepts, in ſuch a Variety of Lights aſſiſting each other, and they are ſometimes impreſſed ſo ſuddenly and advantageouſly upon us, that if our Underſtandings are not gratified with the moſt beautiful Arrangement, and moſt entertaining Speculations, our Hearts are however excited to Acts and Habits of Faith and Virtue with the ſtrongeſt Efficacy. Beſides, Repetitions might be extremely neceſſary, in different Books, written at different Times: and may be very uſeful even now, when theſe Books are laid before us all at once, to inculcate what after all we learn inſufficiently.

But further yet: The Scripture is not indeed a Plan of Chriſtianity, finiſhed with minute Accuracy, to inſtruct Men as in ſomething al-

together new to them, which it was not; or to excite a vain Admiration in them: but it is ſomewhat unſpeakably nobler, and more extenſive; comprehending in the grandeſt and moſt magnificent Order, along with every Eſſential of that Plan, the various Diſpenſations of God to Mankind from the forming of this Earth to the Conſummation of all Things. It begins with the Ground-work of natural Religion, the Creation of the Univerſe by one holy and good and wiſe Being: relating diſtinctly, how all thoſe Parts of it, which the Heathen worſhipped as Gods, were in Truth the Work of God's Hands. It proceeds to the Origin of the Patriarchal, *Jewiſh* and Chriſtian Religion, the Introduction of Sin by the Fall of our firſt Parents, of which we experience the wretched Effects. It goes on to that amazing Puniſhment of Sin, the univerſal Deluge, proved to be as certain, as it was wonderful, by the remaining Traces of it throughout the Globe. It then recites the ſecond Peopling of the World, the Relapſe of Mankind into Wickedneſs, the Choice of one Family and People to preſerve the Knowledge of God, and to be as *a Light ſhining in a dark Place*[r], for the Benefit

[r] 2 Pet. i. 19.

of all about them, that would turn their Eyes and Feet to the Way of Peace. It lays before us the Laws given to this People. It recounts their Hiſtory, chiefly with Regard to their moral and religious Behaviour, and dwells on the Characters and Actions of their moſt remarkable Perſons. It ſupplies us with admirable Patterns of genuine Piety in the *Pſalms*, moſt virtuous Inſtructions for the prudent Conduct of Life in the Book of *Proverbs*, for bearing Afflictions in that of *Job*, for thinking juſtly of Wealth, Honour, Pleaſure, Science, in *Eccleſiaſtes*. Then in the prophetical Books it gives us, together with the ſublimeſt and worthieſt Ideas of God, and our Duties towards him, the moſt affecting Denunciations of that private and public Miſery and Ruin, which will ever attend Sin, whether cloaked by Superſtition, or diſplayed in Profaneneſs. And, along with all theſe Things, it unfolds a Series of Predictions, reaching from the Beginning of the Old Teſtament to the End; and growing, from obſcure and general, continually clearer and more determinate; concerning the Appearance of a Divine Perſon on Earth, for the Recovery of fallen Man, the Revival and Propagation of true Religion throughout the World. The

Books of the New Teſtament open to us the Execution of this great Deſign. The Goſpels record his ſupernatural Birth, his unſpotted and exemplary Life, his aſtoniſhing and gracious Miracles, his pure and benevolent Doctrine, his *dying for our Offences, and riſing again for our Juſtification*[s], his Miſſion of fit Perſons, endued with the Gifts of the holy Spirit to *teach all Nations*[t], his own Aſcenſion into Heaven, and ſitting at the right Hand of God, till he ſhall come to judge the Quick and the Dead. The *Acts of the Apoſtles* relate the wonderful Succeſs of their Preaching, and the original Foundation of the Catholic Church. The *Epiſtles* contain their admirable Directions to Clergy and Laity. And the *Revelation* concludes with foretelling the State of Chriſtianity, primitive, degenerate and reformed, to the laſt Ages. Can there now be a grander, a more comprehenſive, a more uſeful Scheme of Inſtruction than this? And doth not the Uniformity and Variety joined through the whole of it, which, as I have already ſhewn you, gives Evidence of its coming from God, give it alſo inexpreſſible Beauty? And what then if ſmaller Parts, in ſo vaſt a Work, appear in ſome Diſorder, barren and

[s] Rom. iv. 25. [t] Matt. xxviii. 19.

neglected?

neglected? Do we not ſee the ſame Appearance of Neglect, here and there, through all the Works of Nature? Yet they are the Productions of an all-wiſe Being. Are we not even ſtruck with it, as majeſtic and graceful in human Performances? And why do we object againſt it in the Word of God? Or by what Right do miſerable Sinners claim, that their Maker, if he ſends them Declarations of his Will, and Offers of Pardon, ſhall poliſh every Article to their Liking, or ſubjoin his Reaſons to each Part, when his Authority is fully ſufficient?

But to obviate more diſtinctly Objections againſt the Profitableneſs of Scripture, let us examine more particularly the ſeveral Sorts of Books, that compoſe it. In the earlier hiſtorical Parts, amongſt many moſt important Accounts of ancient Time, which we can learn no where elſe, there are ſome Things imperfectly related. But perhaps the Writer knew them but imperfectly: and God was not bound to give him a fuller Knowledge. The Perſons, for whom they were primarily written, underſtood them ſufficiently by means of what is ſaid: and we have no Right to underſtand more of them than we do, indeed not ſo much.

Other

Other Paſſages again ſeem of ſmall Conſequence. But they might be of far greater formerly. The Genealogies of thoſe, by whom the Earth was firſt peopled, and of conſiderable Families in ſucceeding Ages, even the dry Catalogues of Names, were, at the Time of their being recorded, and long after, partly Confirmations of the Truth of the Hiſtory, partly Notices of Things very intereſting. The Diviſion of the Land of *Canaan* in *Joſhua*, the Liſt of Deſcents in the Beginning of *Chronicles*, were Titles to Inheritances. The Pedigree of the *Levites* was neceſſary to regulate their Miniſtrations: that of the Poſterity of *David*, to aſcertain the Birth of the Meſſiah. If theſe, and other Parts of the Narration, are not equally agreeable or inſtructive now, it is eaſy to paſs them over. We have no Ground to complain of loſing the Entertainment or Information, which others formerly had from them: for we are abundantly recompenſed by being taught many moſt material Things, of which Men in thoſe Days were ignorant. Yet neither had they any juſt Ground to complain. For God may full as conſiſtently with all his Attributes communicate more to one than to another by Revelation, as by their natural Abilities, and Situation

Situation in Life. The Diſcoveries, which he hath made in Scripture, are progreſſive; ſome to one Age, greater to the next: and thoſe, which he hath decreed to be made by natural Reaſon, are in this Reſpect of the ſame Kind. Every Generation goes off unacquainted with a Number of deſirable and beneficial Things, which the ſucceeding ones come to know familiarly.

It is farther alledged, that we read in the Bible of very bad Actions, done by ſuch as are called very good Perſons: and Men are in Danger of being miſled by them. But are they not in almoſt equal Danger of being miſled by ſeeing good Perſons do bad Actions almoſt every Day? And if this is no Objection againſt the Providence of God, why is the other againſt his Word? Sometimes the Connexion of the Story requires them to be told: and they are ſeldom, if ever, told without a Cenſure, either expreſſed or viſibly implied, unleſs the Sin be ſo very notorious, as to need none. At leaſt the Precepts of the ſacred Books are a Guard, more than ſufficient, againſt the ill Influence of any ſuch Hiſtories: which will never do Harm, provided we remember but this one plain Rule, that nothing contrary to moral Virtue is or can be deſigned

ſigned to be taught there. On the contrary, they may ſerve to various uſeful Purpoſes. Recording the Sins of thoſe, who in the main were eminently pious, is one Proof, amongſt many, of the Impartiality of the Writers; and furniſhes every Reader with ſtrong Motives, to Circumſpection, leſt He alſo fall; to Repentance, when he hath fallen; to Humility in thinking of himſelf, to Charity in Reſpect of others, who *are overtaken in Faults* [a].

There are likewiſe, it muſt be owned, Actions not only related in Scripture, but related with the Appearance, nay with Expreſſions, of Approbation, and even ſaid to be commanded by God, that ſeem at the firſt View liable to great Objections in Point of Morality. And theſe are pleaded by ſome againſt its Authority, by others againſt its Uſefulneſs. But then it muſt be obſerved, as to ſuch Commands, that God hath a ſovereign Right to diſpoſe of all his Creatures as He pleaſes; that he may have many Reaſons for his Pleaſure, of which we are ignorant; that he may as allowably appoint any Perſon or People to execute it, as the civil Magiſtrate may appoint an Executioner of common Juſtice; and that by Virtue of ſuch Divine

[a] Gal. vi. 1.

Ap-

Appointments, well proved, as thoſe in Scripture are, Things may be very lawfully done, which otherwiſe would be very unlawful; and which therefore were not intended, (nor can eaſily be miſtaken, if we will uſe our Underſtandings at all) for Patterns to be followed where no Revelations are given; and in our Days none are to be expected. Such, for Inſtance, was the Command to *Abraham* for ſacrificing his Son; to the *Jews* for deſtroying the *Canaanites*; and to other Perſons on other Occaſions. Again, ſometimes God is repreſented by the ſacred Writers not only as commanding, but as doing himſelf, Things hard to reconcile with his Attributes. But then plainly on ſeveral Occaſions Scripture ſeems to ſay, that he doth, what it only means to ſay, that he permits: becauſe nothing is done without him, and every Thing is over-ruled by him to his own good Purpoſes. Time will not permit me to enter into every Particular: and therefore I muſt be content to add in general, that if we bear always in Mind, as we ought, the abſolute Sovereignty of God, and the unſearchable Depths of his Wiſdom; if we allow for Circumſtances, probably well known when the Hiſtory of theſe Facts was written, and

therefore

therefore leſs needful to be related; or indeed if we only pay due Regard to Circumſtances, which are related, in that very Part of Scripture, or ſome other; we ſhall either find the Means of clearing up the Difficulties of this Nature which occur, eſpecially by calling in proper Help; or however we ſhall perceive it to be likely, from the Diſcoveries which have been made already, that they will be cleared up hereafter. And reflect, I entreat you, what can we ſay more than this, concerning ſeveral Parts of God's Creation, which ſeem to be noxious inſtead of beneficial, and of his Providence, which ſeem hurtful to the Intereſts of Piety and Virtue; and yet undoubtedly proceed from him, and are worthy of him? To one Uſe at leaſt, and that of the greateſt Moment, all ſuch Things are adapted, to teach us, from a Senſe of our own Ignorance, deep Self-Abaſement, and implicit Veneration for the Lord of All.

Another Part of Scripture, pretended by ſome to be unprofitable and unaccountable, is that, which lays before us the ceremonial Precepts of the *Jewiſh* Law. But no Wonder, if when we are not bound to practiſe any of them, we are not able to account for all of them. Some,

which

which appear to the illiterate very ſtrange, are proved by the learned to be wiſe Prohibitions of the Superſtitions and idolatrous Rites of their heathen Neighbours; and others to be equally wiſe Compliances with, or Accommodations to, their innocent Cuſtoms. And how do we know, at ſuch a Diſtance of Time, what a Number more there may have been of this Kind? Some again ſeem deſigned to convey, under their literal Senſe, figurative moral Inſtructions; That being a Method of teaching anciently admired, and therefore proper to be imitated [w]. Not a few were plainly contrived to give Intimations beforehand concerning the Facts and Doctrines of the Goſpel: very comfortable at the Time, though obſcure, as God ſaw fit they ſhould be; very uſeful now, by proving, what was always the Divine Intention; and particularly uſeful againſt the *Jews*, who thus bear Teſtimony to the very Books, that confute them. Beſides, it might be, independently on all this, extremely neceſſary for that carnal People to be employed in a pompous Form of Piety with many Ceremonies: which,

[w] Concerning ſymbolical Laws, and the Unfitneſs of requiring to know the Reaſons of ancient Inſtitutions, ſee Authorities of the Pandects, and Paſſages of Heathen Writers, in *Taylor*'s Elements of Civil Law, p. 45, 46, 47.

however,

however, they had sufficient Means of knowing were of no Avail, without inward Goodness. And the conducting of Religion in Purity, through such a State of Things, is no small Evidence, that the Hand which conducted it was God's. But were the Communication of these ritual Appointments to us, no otherwise advantageous, it would shew us the happy Superiority of our own Condition, who *worship God* without them *in Spirit and in Truth*[x]. But lastly, the Pentateuch, which contains them, contains over and above many Things of unspeakable Importance, not only to the Proof, but the Understanding of Christianity. We must have both conveyed down to us in it, or neither. Which would we chuse? And where is the Injury, if in order to give all that is profitable, our Maker gives more than is necessary?

Exceptions have been also taken to the Book of *Psalms*, as having in it frequent Imprecations against Enemies, which may tempt us to the like. But most of them, if not all, might full as agreeably to the Genius of the *Hebrew* Language, have been translated as Predictions only[y], which in the Case of Sinners being ge-

[x] John iv. 23, 24. [y] Gregory the Great, *De Curâ Pastoral.* Part i. c. i. p. 5. saith, the Psalmist wrote *Ps.* lxvii. 23. *non optantis animo, sed prophetantis ministerio.*

nerally

nerally conditional (to take Effect unleſs they repent) were in Reality nothing more than Warnings, and therefore Kindneſſes indeed to the Offenders, againſt whom they were denounced. Or if the holy Penmen were ſometimes commiſſioned by Inſpiration to foretell abſolutely, and even to call down the Judgements of God on wicked Perſons, how can this be likely to miſlead us, who know ſuch Commiſſions to be ceaſed, and our ſtanding Rule to be, *Bleſs, and curſe not*[z]?

It hath been objected too againſt the Book of *Eccleſiaſtes*, that ſome Paſſages in it favour of Irreligion, ſome of Immorality. But theſe in Truth are either innocent, when rightly interpreted; or elſe expreſs, not the wiſe King's Sentiments, but the falſe Opinions of others, whom he perſonates to confute them; or however not his deliberate Sentiments, but ſuch haſty wrong Notions, as during the Courſe of his Inquiry after Happineſs roſe up ſucceſſively in his Mind, and were on mature Conſideration rejected by him, to fix at laſt on the true Baſis, *the Concluſion of the whole Matter, to fear God and keep his Commandments, becauſe he ſhall bring every Work into Judgement, with every*

[z] Rom. xii. 14.

ſecret Thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil [a].

The *Song of Solomon* hath likewiſe given Offence to Readers of more Delicacy than Judgement. But they would do well to recollect, that the intimate Relation between God, or Chriſt, and the Church, is figured by that between Huſband and Wife in many Places, both of the Old and New Teſtament, particularly in the 45th Pſalm, which (though the Scene of it be laid in higher Life) ſeems to have given Occaſion to this Song; that very indearing and improving Reflections naturally riſe from ſo intereſting a Compariſon; that deſcribing the Intercourſe by Metaphors drawn from the paſtoral State, is extremely agreeable to the Simplicity, the Humility, the Mildneſs of Religion; that the devotional, as well as other Affections of the Eaſtern People, are extremely warm; and that none of their Allegories (eſpecially ſuch a one as that in Queſtion) are ever to be applied minutely: but we are to lay hold and dwell on the principal Points; of Love to God producing Felicity; Negligence, Deſertion; Penitence, Forgiveneſs: conſidering moſt of the reſt as mere Ornament, adapted with much Conde-

[a] Eccl. xii. 13, 14.

ſcenſion

ſcenſion to the Turn of the Nation and the Age.

But Difficulties have been raiſed in Relation to the prophetical Books, as well as theſe. Directions, it is ſaid, are mentioned, as given in them to the Prophets, which appear improbable and unfit. But then we may juſtly think, as the ableſt of the *Jews* themſelves have thought, that ſeveral of theſe were executed in Viſion only: a ſupernatural Impreſſion was made on their Minds, by which they ſeemed to do what in Fact they did not, that ſo they might be enabled to deliver their Meſſage in a more affecting Manner. And who ſhall preſcribe to God, how to communicate his Revelations? Other ſtrange Things really done by them, were done in Conſequence of the univerſal Cuſtom, then in Uſe, of inſtructing Perſons by Actions, which are natural Signs, along with, or inſtead of, Words, which are but arbitrary ones. And if that Cuſtom had not been ſo proper and convenient, as perhaps it is; yet God's Compliance with it, whilſt it obtained, was undoubtedly gracious and fitted to produce good Effects.

Again ſome have complained, that the Language of the Prophets, above the reſt of Scrip-

ture, is often harſh and coarſe, dark and peculiar; and on theſe Accounts ill adapted to common Benefit. But ſurely it is alſo, very often, extremely natural and eaſy, convincing and perſuaſive, alarming and forcible, graceful and engaging. Wherever it ſeems exceptionable therefore, large Allowances muſt be made for the Boldneſs and conſequent Obſcurity of the original Tongue, eſpecially in Poetry: which yet in all Tongues is more affecting, and more eaſily remembered, than Proſe; and on theſe Accounts prudently choſen in many Parts of the prophetical Writings. But indeed the Stile of the Oriental People on every Subject, except in their Hiſtory, is lofty and conciſe, abounding in ſtrong and expreſſive Figures, carried often to ſtrange Lengths, above regarding the little Niceties that we think ſo eſſential, full of quick Turns and abrupt Tranſitions. Without ſuch Ornaments as theſe a Compoſition would appear languid and deſpicable to Them; who, being the Perſons originally and immediately intereſted in the ſacred Books, ought ſurely to be more conſidered than we, who come ſo long after. And yet even we, with due Attention, may diſcover, not only the utmoſt Sublimity of Senſe, in the hardeſt Paſſages, but the moſt exquiſite

Beauties of Speech, profuſely ſcattered throughout, like the Riches of Nature through the Globe; though, like them too, with a magnificent Negligence and Irregularity, which little Wits ridicule, and great ones admire; and pious Hearts very juſtly reverence, as the worthier of God, the remoter it is from the laboured Correctneſs of Man. But had the *Jewiſh* Language (while they ſpoke *Hebrew* or *Chaldee*, or when afterwards many of them ſpoke *Greek*) been ſtill more obſcure and ambiguous than we muſt own it to be, and had that Defect been leſs compenſated with the Advantages of Expreſſiveneſs and Grandeur than it is, yet this was not the Fault, either of the Prophets, or of the Apoſtles. They would of Courſe learn and uſe the Stile of their Countrymen: they wrote probably as well in it, as any other good Men of their Time: and God was not bound to teach them to write better. For how far he would extend his Aid, was entirely in his own Choice: and we owe him inexpreſſible Gratitude for the *Things* he hath communicated, how little ſoever he might interfere in directing the *Words*. But indeed had they been endued with ever ſo great Excellency of Speech, they could have applied to

their Hearers or Readers in no other Phraſes, than ſuch as they comprehended, were accuſtomed, and would hearken, to: and the Difficulties ariſing from hence in the ſacred Writings were unavoidable.

But here a farther Complaint is made, that in ſeveral Places they are deſignedly guarded againſt being clearly underſtood. And we own they are: for the Subject required it. Predictions too plain might hinder their own Execution: as, in many common Caſes, the previous Publication of a Thing, which elſe would certainly have been done, will prevent it moſt effectually. And therefore they ought to be formed in the Manner they are: ſo as not to betray the Intention to every one prematurely, nor yet leave Room to any one for doubting afterwards, to what Event the Prophecy related. Had all the Particulars of our Saviour's Life and Death, which are foretold, been too diſtinctly ſet forth to be miſtaken or overlooked, the *Jews* would have taken Care they ſhould not happen; and have juſtified their Rejection of him by the Failure. Again: had the Kingdom of the Meſſiah been every where deſcribed by the Prophets as intirely a ſpiritual one, in which all Mankind were to have an equal

Share;

Share; that perverſe Nation, on hearing, that their civil Polity and ceremonial Worſhip was all to be aboliſhed, would either, from Contempt, have grown negligent of it, and thrown it off too ſoon; or elſe, from Fondneſs for it, would have ſuppreſſed or corrupted the Paſſages, declaring it ſhould ceaſe: which Providence deſigned them to preſerve, for an Evidence againſt themſelves, as they have proved to be. And therefore the Goſpel Days are prefigured by a Mixture of temporal Images with others, liable to be miſunderſtood before the Time of Explanation came, but ſoon apprehended then by every fair Mind; though ſtill open to the Cavils of others, who, to uſe the Terms of St. *Peter*, *ſtumble at the Word, being diſobedient, whereunto alſo they were appointed* [b]. Not, *appointed to be diſobedient:* but appointed, ſince they would be diſobedient, to take their own Courſe and the Conſequences of it: to *ſtumble* and fall at Difficulties, of which they would eaſily have ſeen the proper Solution, and ſo got over them unhurt, had they but modeſtly begged, and dutifully followed, the divine Illumination.

I cannot proceed now to the Objections, which have been raiſed againſt the Uſefulneſs

[b] 1 Pet. ii. 8.

of the Books of the New Teſtament: and therefore contenting myſelf at preſent with recommending to your Conſideration what you have heard, ſhall conclude with the comfortable, yet awful Words of the Prophet: *Who is wiſe, and he ſhall underſtand theſe Things? prudent, and he ſhall know them? For the Ways of the Lord are right, and the Juſt ſhall walk in them: but the Tranſgreſſors ſhall fall therein* [c].

[c] Hoſ. xiv. 9.

SER-

SERMON III.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by Inſpiration of God: and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs: that the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works.

HAVING undertaken to ſhew you

I. That Scripture is of Divine Authority;

II. That it anſwers every Purpoſe of Religion;

III. That we ought to read and ſtudy it diligently;

IV. How we may do this to the beſt Effect:

I have finiſhed the firſt Head, and made ſome Progreſs in the ſecond, the complete Uſefulneſs of holy Writ. The direct Evidence of this I laid before you, fully I hope, though briefly,

briefly, for it lies in a ſmall Compaſs: by proving, that in the Nature of the Thing, Books inſpired to give Men the Knowledge of Religion muſt be in the higheſt Degree profitable for that End; by ſpecifying their own expreſs Declarations, that they are ſo; by referring you to the Experience of innumerable Multitudes, that have found them ſo. Then I proceeded to anſwer the ſeveral Objections raiſed againſt the Truth of this Aſſertion: ſome of them general, that the Bible is not ſo ſhort, ſo plain, ſo methodical as one ſhould have expected for the Benefit of Mankind; ſome again particular, and levelled againſt ſeveral Things recorded in its ſeveral Parts. To theſe I gave Solutions, as far as the Old Teſtament was concerned. Let us now go on to the New.

The Hiſtory of our Saviour is written there by four Evangeliſts. And ſome tell us their Narrations differ in ſo many Things, that the reading of them is perplexing, and even their Authority doubtful. But what are theſe Things? The Words, related in one Evangeliſt, as ſpoken on ſuch or ſuch an Occaſion, vary from thoſe in another. But perhaps the Words, that are in each, were ſpoken ſucceſſively: or each puts the *Hebrew* Words, which he heard, into his own

own *Greek*, by a ſtricter or a freer Tranſlation, but ſtill without altering the Senſe. Again, one ſets down Facts, which another omits. But this is no Proof of Contradiction. For they profeſſedly omit many Facts, which they knew to be real. One of them paſſes over Things, becauſe another before him had related them. Hence probably St. *Matthew* and St. *Mark* omit ſeveral Particulars, which are in St. *Luke*, who wrote firſt. And St. *John*, who came laſt, ſupplies a great deal, which the others have not, and writes very little, which they have; excepting the Hiſtory of our Saviour's Death and Reſurrection, which it was fit they ſhould all have. Thus no ſingle Goſpel containing every Thing, (though it did contain every Thing neceſſary) each of them was ſhorter, and therefore much more commodiouſly obtained at firſt, when Books were written very ſlowly, and ſold very dear; ſo that he who could not procure the four, might however furniſh himſelf with one: and we may now have the joint Benefit of them all. But farther, when they ſeem to be relating the ſame Fact, the Circumſtances differ. And they may be different, yet conſiſtent. Or if they be inconſiſtent, they are two Facts, and not one, though

though in ſome Reſpects alike. For our Saviour might, at various Times, both perform Miracles and deliver Diſcourſes, nearly akin, and yet really diſtinct. Still after all, even allowing for theſe Things, it is not eaſy to make an orderly Hiſtory of our Saviour's Life and Inſtructions out of the four Evangeliſts. For they did not think it, nor was it always, requiſite, to mark down the Order, in which Things happened. They might, for one good Cauſe or other, relate ſuch of them together, as were not done together: but then, as they do not ſay they were, this is no Falſehood. And learned Men, agreeing in the main, though not in all Particulars, have brought them to a Harmony each with the other, only by allowing a very few Things to have been tranſpoſed in one of them. But were the Attempt harder than it is, our Edification from our Saviour's Diſcourſes depends very little on the Time, or Place, or other Circumſtances, of their Delivery. Common Perſons need not attend to ſuch Points at all: and Perſons of more Ability will find both a Trial of their Impartiality, and a Reward of their Labour, in ſtudying them. Indeed were the ableſt Men incapable of reconciling all Difficulties, it doth not follow, that they are irreconcileable,

concileable. Or though they were, the Conſequence would be only, that the divine Superintendency, under which the Authors wrote, extended not to ſuch minute Circumſtances, though it did and muſt to Doctrines and Precepts, and principal Facts [a]. Not very much therefore would be loſt by this: and one Advantage would be gained; that theſe Diverſities would ſtill more evidently ſhew, (what indeed the whole Air and Manner of their Writings ſhews) that the Evangeliſts are abſolutely free from all Imputation of concerting their Story together, to deceive Mankind: the Aſſurance of which makes good Amends in Reſpect of Uſefulneſs, for any Perplexities we may find in adjuſting their Accounts.

Another Complaint is, that our Saviour's Parables, which make up a conſiderable Part of his Doctrine in the three firſt Evangeliſts, are obſcure, and ſome of them purpoſely made ſo: and that a great deal of what he ſaith in the fourth is not clearer. But it ſhould be conſidered, that Parables were not only an admired Way of teaching then, but a valuable one in

[a] Concerning this Matter ſee Gauſſen, *de verbo Dei*, §. 64, &c. See alſo Archbiſhop Potter's Lectures, p. 141, &c. where the Opinions of Eraſmus, Epiſcopius, Grotius, &c. are ſtated.

their

their own Nature; as they excite Attention, pleaſe the Imagination, and faſten upon the Memory. And nothing can be more intelligible, or more beautifully perſuaſive, than moſt, if not all, of our Saviour's Parables, and other Diſcourſes, are now, and were in a very ſhort Time after his own Days. Some of both indeed appeared, and were deſigned to appear, otherwiſe, when he ſpoke them. But theſe were accommodated with the utmoſt Prudence, for letting in Light upon his Hearers by gentle Degrees, which, if poured on them all at once, would have been too ſtrong for many Perſons of good Meaning, but whoſe Prejudices required to be gradually worn off; and would have furniſhed Handles to bad People, for decrying him ſucceſsfully, and deſtroying him, before his Miniſtry had taken due Root. Perhaps it may be thought, that to the latter ſome of his Cenſures were too ſevere, and ſome of his Anſwers not direct enough. But they came from one, who knew the Hearts of Men, and ſpoke to what he ſaw there. The Perſons, to whom theſe Cenſures, or theſe Anſwers, were particularly directed, felt the Propriety of them, though poſſibly the reſt, even of the By-ſtanders, were unable to perceive it: no Wonder then, if we are leſs able.

able. And yet the Writers of the Goſpels could do no otherwiſe, than ſet down what he ſaid, juſt in the Manner that he ſaid it, however dark it might be to us, or to themſelves.

But his Precepts alſo, as well as others in Scripture, are ſaid by ſome to be ſo general and undetermined, that without proper Limitations of them, (which all Men will not think of making, and few can make in every Caſe rightly) they muſt either lead us into Errors, or leave us uncertain what we are to do. Yet conciſe Maxims of ſententious Wiſdom have always been eſteemed in all Nations extremely uſeful, notwithſtanding that ſomewhat remained to be ſupplied in them by the common Senſe of the Hearers or Readers: which muſt indeed be done, more or leſs, in every Thing written or ſpoken. And a Book, that ſhould be framed to give Rules of Action in all the particular Circumſtances of every Caſe that would happen, would be much too voluminous for vulgar Uſe, and too intricate for vulgar Underſtandings: whereas Rules that ſet the Heart right in the principal Points, will go a great Way towards ſetting the Conduct right in all. Beſides, there is in general very ſmall Danger, that Precepts of Piety and Morals will be taken in too comprehenſive

prehenſive and ſevere a Senſe. And therefore the main Buſineſs is, to make them comprehenſive and ſevere enough, which it will be allowed the Scripture hath done: and yet with ſuch Openings for the rational Interpretation of them, that there is no one Command, in the Goſpels or elſewhere, of which the moſt illiterate Perſon, who is at all attentive and diſcreet, may not ſufficiently apprehend the juſt Bounds; either by his own Compariſon of them with other Texts, or however by the Help of ſuch farther Inſtruction and Explication, as in worldly Affairs Men are well content to aſk and receive, and would ſcarce know any one Thing upon Earth without it. If People have not Ability and Leiſure enough to find out their Duty, from the Directions in the Bible, much leſs would they ever deduce the whole, or any conſiderable Part of it, from its firſt Principles, by the mere Light of Nature. And whatever Pretences are made, that the Injunctions of Scripture are not determinate enough, the true inward Objection commonly is, that they are too determinate againſt ſome favourite Inclinations: whereas, were Men left to make a Syſtem for themſelves, they could eaſily mould and bend the Laws of Conduct to their own Liking.

Againſt

Againſt the Uſefulneſs of *the Acts of the Apoſtles*, which is evidently very great, I think there are no peculiar Exceptions taken, worth mentioning here. For the Difficulties, raiſed on ſome Points of Hiſtory in the Speeches of St. *Stephen* and *Gamaliel*, are not material, and have been ſufficiently cleared up. But heavy Charges are brought againſt the Epiſtles of St. *Paul*, authorized, we are told, by St. *Peter* himſelf, who affirms, that *ſome Things in them are hard to be underſtood, which the unlearned and unſtable wreſt, as they do alſo the other Scriptures, unto their own Deſtruction* [b]. But doth St. *Peter* mean here to cenſure St. *Paul*; whom he calls, in the preceding Verſe, his *beloved Brother*; who, he ſaith, *hath written according to the Wiſdom given unto him*, that is from above; and to whoſe Writings he refers Chriſtians for fuller Inſtruction concerning what he himſelf is teaching? Certainly not, unleſs he cenſures the other Scriptures too: for he ſpeaks of them all in juſt the ſame Terms. And therefore he only gives a Caution concerning Paſſages, which, either from the Abſtruſeneſs of the Subject, the Impropriety of explaining it fully at that Time, or God's Purpoſe of trying the Reader's Fair-

[b] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

neſs of Mind, were involved in ſome Obſcurity. And even of theſe he doth not ſay, either that not underſtanding them at all would be dangerous; (for, though uſeful Truths, they might come ſhort of neceſſary ones, or might be more intelligibly taught elſewhere;) or that all Perſons would be in Danger from underſtanding them wrongly; but only *the unlearned*, that is, unacquainted with the Doctrines of Religion, for he ſpeaks of no other Learning; *and the unſtable*, or unſettled in their Diſpoſitions, who have no Root of Steadfaſtneſs in Faith or Practice. Nor doth he ſay of theſe, that weakly miſtaking ſuch Paſſages might be *their Deſtruction*, but violently *wreſting* and torturing them, to ill Senſes, for ill Purpoſes. By Uſage of this Kind, a hard Text or two may be wickedly perverted to contradict ever ſo many plain ones, in the moſt neceſſary Articles of Belief or Duty: and the Condemnation of ſuch as do it, and perſiſt in it, is juſt. But how can any Argument be drawn from hence, to diſprove the Uſefulneſs of the ſacred Books? The Books of Nature and Providence, it will ſurely be owned, are uſeful, and to be read by all Men. Yet are there not, in Them likewiſe, *Things hard to be underſtood, which the unlearned and unſtable*,

ble, which the moſt learned and beſt grounded, (in their own Opinions) *wreſt* to the Service of Atheiſm, Infidelity, Superſtition, Immorality; and ſo ruin themſelves in the next Life, perhaps in this too?

Doubtleſs the Epiſtles of St. *Paul* are in many Places difficult. In ſome he pours out the Abundance of his Knowledge and Piety ſo copiouſly, that common Capacities are unable to receive it all, ſeem loſt amidſt the Profuſion of it, and are forced to let a great deal flow by unapprehended, at leaſt till after frequent attentive Readings; in every one of which however they imbibe moſt refreſhing and ſtrengthening Nouriſhment. Sometimes again, indeed often, he viſibly refers to the then preſent State of the ſeveral Churches; to various Queſtions, which they had propoſed to him; to Cuſtoms entertained by them; to erroneous Notions, remaining or ſtarted up amongſt them: which Notions too he appears to confute, now and then, by Reaſonings taken from other Notions of theirs, poſſibly ſome of them erroneous likewiſe, or however doubtful; that ſo, by entangling them in their own miſtaken Perſuaſions, they might be induced to throw them all aſide, and take up juſter and more conſiſtent Princi-

ples. Now as we have no other Knowledge of these Things, in our Days, than we can collect from the Epistles themselves; no Wonder, if we are sometimes much at a Loss. But to the Persons who received them, we have Cause to think, they were very intelligible: and the Condescension of arguing with them in their own Way must be very obliging, and the Effect of the whole throughly convincing: else they had not continued to honour Him and his Writings in the Manner and Degree, which we know they did. Nor is it very hard for Us now to understand the far greatest Part of them: and the Profit well repays the Labour. But the Parts of more general and especially practical Use, which make a large Share of the whole, we cannot avoid understanding. So that on the whole his own Words concerning his teaching are perfectly justifiable: *If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them that believe not* [c].

To the Epistles, which follow St. *Paul*'s, no considerable Objection is made. For, as to any Pretence of Difference between Him and St. *James*, about Faith and Works, the former

[c] 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

evidently

evidently means only, that neither Obſervance of the Peculiarities of the *Moſaic* Law, nor the exact Obſervance of any Law, is requiſite for our Acceptance with God, but Faith in his Covenant of Forgiveneſs through Chriſt: and the latter means only, that this Faith muſt be ſuch, as produces an honeſt and diligent, though not faultleſs, Performance of ſuch Works, as that Covenant preſcribes; otherwiſe it is dead and fruitleſs: which two Doctrines are perfectly conſiſtent, and abſolutely neceſſary to the Comfort and Direction of Mankind.

The concluding Book of Scripture, *the Revelation of St. John*, is accuſed of Obſcurity, and conſequently of Uſeleſſneſs, perhaps beyond any other. But it ſhould be obſerved in Regard to this and all of them, that it may be very material, in Religion as well as in Philoſophy, to have ſome Information about Matters, which yet we can underſtand but very imperfectly; and though there were more Things than there are, not at all underſtood now; yet theſe either have been underſtood by thoſe, whom they concerned formerly, or will be underſtood by thoſe, whom they ſhall concern hereafter: as unqueſtionably in Nature many Things, which have never been cleared up,

nor their Uſes known as yet, will be cleared up in Time to very good Purpoſe. And who can tell how glorious a Light may one Day burſt forth, and how ſeaſonably, from the darkeſt and leaſt regarded Prophecies both of the Old Teſtament and the New, to confirm the Evidence and illuſtrate the Doctrines of Chriſtianity? But in the mean while, they exerciſe very beneficially the Induſtry of many, the Humility and Reverence of all. Though we ſhould never find the Meaning of ſome of them, we may, by ſearching after it, find that of others unexpectedly, as happens in various Caſes beſides. And further ſtill, be ſome Parts of Scripture ever ſo unintelligible, we have this Comfort, that they cannot make the clear ones unintelligible too.

Yet here it is anſwered by the bolder Sort of Objectors, that no Body can ſay, what is clear in Scripture: there are Diverſities of Opinion about the moſt fundamental Points of Revelation. Every Thing is diſputed; every Diſputant alledges what he calls plain Texts in his Favour: and how can there be a ſtronger Proof, than this from Fact, that the whole Syſtem of the Bible is obſcure and uncertain, and therefore of little Uſe? But conſider: Are not the

funda-

fundamental Points of natural Religion, of Morality, of civil Government, diſputed too? Have not all the Principles of Science, the Credibility of Hiſtory, the very Evidence of Senſe, been controverted? And doth not every Body appeal to plain Reaſon in theſe Controverſies, juſt as they do to plain Scripture in thoſe of Theology? And do they not all make a Shift to ſay ſomething plauſible for themſelves, or againſt their Adverſaries? And will not this be always the Caſe, as long as there are in the World conceited or perverſe, ignorant or inconſiderate, intereſted or ambitious Perſons? But muſt we therefore give up every Thing for doubtful, and uſeleſs? Or if not, why muſt we give up Scripture? Why not truſt ourſelves, that we ſee what we do ſee, there no leſs than elſewhere, notwithſtanding that there may be Perſons, who pretend to ſee the contrary? Infidels venture to be very poſitive in their Notions, though the ableſt, the beſt, the Generality of Men reject them, though they differ widely amongſt themſelves about them; though, when ſearched to the Bottom, they are unſpeakably more difficult to underſtand, and more unſatisfactory, ſo far as they are underſtood, than Ours. Why then do we ſuffer them

to unſettle Us by Pleas, that hold ſtronger againſt themſelves?

Another very material Conſideration is this. However dark and perplexing ſome would have the Bible thought, in Fact it is certain, that wherever it hath been reſpected and carefully read, the very loweſt of the People have had infinitely juſter Sentiments of God and their Duty, than the higheſt in other Places. The Paſſages, which it is pretended muſt needs give them wrong and groſs Ideas, of the Divine Nature and Attributes for Inſtance, of a future State, or of any Thing elſe, do in Reality ſcarce ever produce that Effect in any of them; but either they underſtand the boldeſt Figures eaſily, or at leaſt know they are but Figures; and therefore though they may not apprehend them diſtinctly, they are not miſled by them at all. Indeed the very Foundation of that whole Way of arguing, which confident Perſons uſe on this Subject, is wrong: and we need not embarraſs ourſelves about the Particulars of it ſo much as we do. They have ſuggeſted, that if Heaven vouchſafed a Revelation to Mankind, it muſt certainly be the moſt beautiful Compoſition, in the cleareſt Language and the moſt regular Method poſſible; every Thing muſt be fully explained

plained in it, nothing capable of being contradicted or doubted; and every Part of the World must be put in Possession of it. Now we find that this is not true of the Old and New Testament, and therefore some are inclined to question, whether indeed they are Gifts of God, or, however, Gifts of any extraordinary Value. But the same Persons might just as well have suggested, that all the Knowledge he gives us by natural Means also must be easily acquired, perfect and universal: which we experience it not to be. God hath provided Remedies for the Diseases of our Bodies: the greatest Blessing we have, next to those for the Wants of our Souls. But [d] many of them were unknown to Mankind till very lately, are known but to few now, perhaps very many, that will be known, are not discovered yet. Multitudes have believed in Medicines and Methods of no Use at all: several of the best have been despised, rejected, ridiculed; fierce and long Disputes have arisen about the Nature and Benefit of others; and perhaps, after much Pains taken, much Uncertainty still remains: the most efficacious and approved are often disagreeable and disgustful; unskilfully or dishonestly applied, they

[d] See Bishop Butler's Analogy, p. 265, 266.

have

have often very bad Effects, and oftener yet produce their good ones but ſlowly and imperfectly. Yet we cannot, and we do not, doubt, but there are ſuch Things as real Remedies, which a kind Providence, deſerving our ſincereſt Thanks, hath beſtowed on us. And why then ſhould we heſitate about the divine Original, or ſovereign Uſefulneſs, of the holy Scriptures, merely becauſe they are attended with ſome Diſadvantages of the ſame Sort? Indeed whatever Way of Reaſoning would prove, that our Maker is obliged to relieve either our temporal or ſpiritual Diſorders in the Manner we could wiſh, will prove equally that he is obliged to prevent both: the contrary of which we daily feel. Therefore ſuppoſe the Bible had ſuch Imperfections in it, as it hath not, no more would follow, than that God had extended his Direction and Aſſiſtance to the Writers of it only to a certain Degree: we could never conclude, that he had not directed and aſſiſted them, as far as the Purpoſes of Religion required. It may be ſaid he could have guarded it againſt all poſſible Miſconſtructions, and Objections. But perhaps not without making Man a different Creature from what he is; for weak Men will ſtumble, and wicked Men cavil, at every

every Thing: or not without making Scripture ſo different from what it is, that on the whole it would have anſwered the ſeveral Ends, for which it was deſigned, leſs than it doth. It may be ſaid farther, that at leaſt he could eaſily have guarded it againſt many of the Objections, which have been made. But perhaps he foreſaw, that if he had, others would have been made in their Stead: or he thought fit to exerciſe the Induſtry of ſome Perſons, and try the Uprightneſs of others. In ſhort, we muſt ſuffer the all-wiſe God, both to govern his World, and to reveal his Will, in his own Way.

But a careful and judicious Inſpection will ſhew in his Word, as it doth in his Works, not only that Beauty and Uſe abound much more than was conceived at firſt View; but that many imagined Deformities are real Excellencies; and many ſeemingly worthleſs or inconvenient Things, neceſſary or beneficial: whereas the fineſt Pieces of human Art ſeldom fail of ſinking in their Character upon accurate Examination and frequent Review. There are Paſſages in Scripture ſo lofty, that moſt Eyes are unable, without Help, to ſee their Meaning diſtinctly. And why ſhould there not be Things above common Reach, to excite and reward the Attempts

tempts of the able and diligent; to prevent their being ſatiated with plain Doctrines alone, till they grow weary of them; and to give them the Pleaſure of communicating, and others of receiving from them, the Diſcoveries they make: juſt as, in worldly Affairs, God hath appointed, that ſome ſhall be rich and charitable, others poor and thankful; and thus hath provided in the beſt and wiſeſt Manner for All? There are again Paſſages of ſuch great Simplicity and Plainneſs, that they appear to ſome low and flat. But then, not only different Subjects, and Manners of treating them, require very different Styles; but all Nations and Ages have their peculiar Forms of Expreſſion, their Circumlocutions and Repetitions, which, however mean or tedious they may ſeem to others, yet ſeem to them graceful and proper: and ſuch as endeavour to teach and influence them (as the ſacred Writers did the *Jews* and firſt Chriſtian Converts,) do well to comply with eſtabliſhed Uſage in theſe Things, even though they could mend it. For this Reaſon the Authors of the New Teſtament, had they been Maſters of the moſt elegant *Greek*, would have acted wiſely in preferring to it that vulgar Kind, which the Perſons, to whom they wrote, or-

dinarily uſed, and underſtood better [e]. Beſides, artleſs and unadorned Narrations and Exhortations are beſt ſuited to common Capacities; and carry in them ſome Evidence, that they are not contrived to amuſe and deceive: for in that Caſe they would have been more laboured and ornamented. We have no Cauſe therefore, from the Roughneſs and uncouth Prolixity of ſome Parts, to think Scripture ill calculated for the Profit of its Readers; amongſt whom its firſt Readers were firſt to be regarded: but we have much Cauſe from the Dignity, the Perſuaſiveneſs, the Energy of other Parts, to conclude *it is the Power of God unto Salvation* [f]: for elſe, *whence had theſe Men all theſe Things* [g]? We have no Cauſe in the leaſt to blame it for what we do not comprehend; but abundant Cauſe to admire it for what we do; and to argue, like *Socrates* on reading the Works of *Heraclitus*: "So much "as I underſtand is excellent, and therefore I "believe the reſt is ſo too." We want to have the Bible, each according to his natural Diſpo-

[e] See Moſheim's Cogitationes de Interpretatione SS. litterarum, p. 176. where he defends the unpolite Style of Scripture, as moſt intelligible to the Generality, and ſupports his Defence by the Authority of Orig. contra Celſ. l. vi. And Sext. Emp. lib. i. adv. Mathematicos ſeu lib. i. c. 10. adv. Grammaticos, §. 234. p. 265. Ed. Fabr. [f] Rom. i. 16. [g] Matt. xiii. 56.

ſition,

ſition, or acquired Way of thinking, every where ſublime, or eaſy, or elegant, or methodical, or copious, or conciſe. But God hath moſt wiſely made it *all Things to all Men*[h]: hath furniſhed it with the cleareſt and moſt myſterious, the loftieſt and moſt familiar, the cloſeſt and moſt diffuſe, the beſt connected and the abrupteſt Paſſages, all perfectly ſuited to his gracious Purpoſes: and it is monſtrous Perverſeneſs in Us, to make each his own Capacity the Meaſure of the whole; reckon every Thing, that happens to riſe above us, unintelligible; every Thing, that condeſcends to thoſe beneath us, contemptible; and ſo on.

But then farther we ought to conſider, that the lateſt Books of the Bible are near 1700 Years old, the earlieſt many Ages older ſtill: both Parts of it written in Languages, that have long been out of common Uſe; and the firſt in one, of which we have no other Remains approaching towards its Antiquity; and which therefore, were it ever ſo accurate and beautiful originally, is incapable of being perfectly underſtood at preſent. Now theſe Things, and, what muſt accompany them, a great Diverſity of Cuſtoms, and Modes of ſpeaking, from ours,

[h] 1 Cor. ix. 22.

without

without defeating, or obſtructing, the general Deſign of Scripture, muſt of Neceſſity obſcure the Beauty, and even the Meaning, of particular Places; and prevent in ſome Meaſure its appearing to Us what it is in itſelf. The ſame is the Caſe of the ancient fine Writers among the Heathens. Yet none of Them was ever deſpiſed on that Account by Men of Judgement: but they are ſtudied and illuſtrated, and their latent Excellencies pointed out with the greater Care; and perhaps the more admired, for being leſs obvious: and large Allowances are made for thoſe Perfections, which muſt have been formerly viſible, but are no longer ſo. Now ſurely we ought to judge of Scripture with equal Fairneſs and Regard.

Beſides, as all ancient Books in the World have ſuffered more or leſs by the Negligence of Tranſcribers, and the Injuries of Time, yet without the Loſs, or any conſiderable Diminution, of their Uſefulneſs by it; ſo may the Bible. It is much better guarded againſt wilful Corruptions, and even caſual Miſtakes, in material Points, than any other old Record, by the vaſt Multitude of Copies, taken early, diſperſed every where, read in public, weighed in private, quoted in Sermons, Converſations, Books, and

remaining

remaining in the Hands of all different Sects of Chriſtians, who would of Courſe watch one another to prevent any Attempts of making Alterations. Accordingly we find, and have great Cauſe to adore Providence for it, that neither during the long Reign of Popery hath any Text been changed, whatever may have been tried, to favour their Tenets, nor do the various Readings of the Manuſcripts or Tranſlations of any Church upon Earth, affect any ſingle Fundamental of Faith or Practice. But ſtill even ſmall Errors in copying may have rendered Paſſages of leſs Moment, (for in theſe they would be likelier to eſcape Obſervation) defective, harſh, contrary to Grammar, inexplicable; may have broken Connexions, that once were plain; raiſed ſeeming Inconſiſtences, where at firſt there were none; but particularly may have altered Names, and increaſed or leſſened Numbers, which in all Books are very apt to ſuffer by tranſcribing. And the various Diſadvantages, under which any Parts of Scripture may be juſtly ſuppoſed to lie, from ſuch Accidents as theſe, muſt in all Equity be charged, not on itſelf, but on the blameable Careleſſneſs of Mankind. God was not obliged to work Miracles to prevent them: but we are obliged

to

to honour duly whatever comes from him, though we cannot enjoy it in its original Perfection. Length of Time hath not diminiſhed at all in any Thing eſſential, nor very conſiderably in any Thing elſe, the Uſefulneſs of the ſacred Writings: which, I hope, hath now been ſatisfactorily proved and vindicated.

But the Text aſſerts them, not only to be uſeful, but completely uſeful: *that*, by their Means, *the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works:* the Miniſter of the Goſpel fully provided with what he is to preach, the Believer with what he is to learn. I cannot enlarge on this Point, and ſurely I need not: for the Proof is ſhort, and the Objections eaſily obviated without naming them. If the Scriptures are inſpired, what they ſay of themſelves is true; and they ſay they are ſufficient to Salvation, plainly in the Text and elſewhere, and imply it throughout. The Old Teſtament was ſufficient in its Time: how can we doubt, but the New is now? How can we imagine, that in a Volume of ſuch Bulk written by different Perſons all under the Direction of God, profeſſedly for inſtructing Mankind in Religion, and containing ſo many Diſcourſes of Chriſt and his Apoſtles for that Purpoſe, any

Thing neceſſary is omitted? Beſides, we can know no more of Chriſtianity with Certainty by any other Way, than we know by this. Oral Inſtruction would anſwer the End very well for a Time, and did ſo: and therefore St. *Paul* very properly directs the *Theſſalonians* to *hold the Traditions, which they had been taught, whether by Word, or by his Epiſtle*[1]. But Things, delivered by Word of Mouth only, are ſoon loſt or changed; and falſe and miſchievous Traditions riſe up inſtead of the true; as the *Jewiſh* Church had then experienced: and therefore the Chriſtian Covenant was put in Writing by the firſt Publiſhers of it, as the preceding was by *Moſes*. The Chriſtian Writers, who ſucceeded the Apoſtles, were confeſſedly fallible, and conſequently unworthy of equal Regard with them: nor did they attempt to make any Additions to the Rule of Faith and Manners, comprehended in the Bible. On the contrary, they held, as we do, that all eſſential Articles are to be found there: and ſo did the following Ages too: till at Length the Rulers of the Church of *Rome*, having ſet up Notions and Practices, which the Scripture did not warrant, were obliged to pretend, (but very falſely)

[1] 2 Theſſ. ii. 15.

that

that they were taught by the ancient Fathers, or delivered down by Memory. And they decreed in the Council of *Trent*, 200 Years ago, that ſuch Traditions were to be received with the ſame Reſpect, as holy Writ. But let Us reſt on ſurer Ground: *build on the Foundation of the Apoſtles and Prophets, Jeſus Chriſt himſelf being the chief Corner Stone*[k]; and on all Occaſions appeal *to the Law and to the Teſtimony; for if they ſpeak not according to this Word, it is becauſe there is no Light in them*[l].

[k] Eph. ii. 20. [l] Iſ. viii. 20.

SERMON IV.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by Inſpiration of God: and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs: that the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works.

IN diſcourſing on theſe Words, I have already proved

I. That Scripture is of Divine Authority:

II. That it completely anſwers every Purpoſe of Religion.

And therefore I now proceed to the next Head, propoſed in the Beginning, which is

III. That we ought to read and ſtudy it diligently.

This Duty follows with the cleareſt Evidence, from its Inſpiration and Uſefulneſs. For if we

may neglect what was written under so peculiar a Direction of God, for our Guidance to eternal Happiness, to what can we possibly ever be bound to attend? And yet I fear the Consciences of many, if not most of us, can too easily inform us, how little we regard, how seldom we look into, these Books. We exclaim against it perhaps as the wickedest Tyranny in the Church of *Rome*, that it prohibits them to be read without Licence. But do we ourselves make much more Use of our Bibles in the Midst of the fullest Liberty, than if they continued to be locked up from us? Do we not spend a very small Share of our Time, of our Leisure Time, in looking into Them, compared with what is wasted in the idlest Occupations and Amusements? The Hours, which we allot to reading, do we not more commonly, and with far more Pleasure, employ them on any other Sort of Reading, the most insignificant, the most corrupting and pernicious, than on this? Are there not Multitudes, who can hardly name the Time, when, even on the Lord's Day itself, they read a Chapter, with the serious Intention of improving their Souls? Nay, the few, (and very few I doubt they are at present,) who think of Religion in earnest, do they not usually apply to

other Books chiefly for Inſtruction in it, and ſtudy the ſacred Volumes far leſs, than the Compoſitions of fallible Men?

Theſe are Facts as notorious, as they are lamentable. And therefore I ſhall

1. Conſider, in order to remove, the Cauſes, from which ſo wonderful a Contempt of God's Word hath ariſen.

2. Produce his Commands for paying it a very different Regard.

3. Shew, what Evils follow from diſobeying theſe Commands.

1. I ſhall conſider the Cauſes, from which this wonderful Contempt of God's Word hath ariſen.

Now the more general Cauſes doubtleſs are, the original Corruption of our Nature, indiſpoſing us to every Thing good; (againſt which, if we value our Intereſts in a future Life, we ought to watch continually:) and our conſequent Acts and Habits of Sin, which we very abſurdly ſuffer to drive us from the Scripture, that we may be eaſy in them, inſtead of having Recourſe to the Scripture, which would excite us to an effectual Reformation of them. Another very extenſive Cauſe is the wrong Education of our Youth. They are very little taught, in Com-

pariſon of what they ſhould, (if they are taught at all) either by their Parents at Home, or their Maſters or Tutors afterwards, to be reverently converſant in the ſacred Writings, and yet leſs inſtructed how to profit by them. Hence they are unacquainted with their Hiſtory, their Doctrines, their Language: have no early Impreſſions made on them in Favour of what they contain: and ſo, when they are grown up, ignorantly ſlight them, ſin without any Reſtraint from them, and are eaſily induced to join with Scoffers in ridiculing them. All this might be much otherwiſe, if they, who educate Children, were but near ſo careful about it, as true Piety, or even common Prudence, would lead them to be.

Other Cauſes, or Excuſes, for neglecting to read Scripture are, the various Objections made againſt it, many of which you have heard confuted; and the Diſagreeableneſs ariſing from the Peculiarity of its Style, of which alſo I have ſpoken. But ſuch as can read it only in a Tranſlation, (and the reſt are a very ſmall Number in Proportion,) will be tempted to complain of it ſtill more than others: whereas they ought to acknowledge, that they are leſs qualified to judge, and therefore leſs intitled to find Fault.

For all Tranſlations, eſpecially from Writings of diſtant Countries and Ages, loſe a great deal of the Spirit, the Strength, the Elegance, and often the Clearneſs too, of the Original. Beſides, ours is a literal Tranſlation. Even the moſt figurative and poetical Paſſages, and the remoteſt from our whole common Manner of Expreſſion, are almoſt always rendered Word for Word, without aiming at Beauty, but merely at Faithfulneſs. It is incredible, to any but Men of Skill in theſe Matters, how great a Diſadvantage this muſt be. Scarce any other ancient Book could appear tolerable in ſuch a Dreſs, but the Bible: and that ſuffers by it extremely. Yet if this Method had not been choſen, if any fine Paſſages had been brought into a fairer Light, any harſh ones ſoftened, any dark ones explained, any Turn of a Sentence made more forcible or more pleaſing, by taking only ſuch Freedoms, in a moderate Degree, as are taken, to a very great one, in moſt or all other Authors, that we tranſlate; the ſame Perſons, who complain of Flatneſs or Obſcurity now, would have complained of Artifice and Unfairneſs then. And ſurely the ſcrupulous Fidelity, which hath been ſhewn on this Occaſion, well deſerves in Return the Candor of making

making all due Allowances. Amongſt theſe, a very great one is to be made on the following Account, that even this Tranſlation was publiſhed above 150 Years ago; when Multitudes of Texts were not near ſo well underſtood, and conſequently could not be ſo rightly expreſſed, as they have been ſince: when alſo our Language was different, in ſeveral Particulars, from what it is at preſent; and therefore, though it hath been happily ſecured, by the common Uſe of our Bible and Prayer Book, from changing ſo faſt as it did before, yet ſome Phraſes in both are become leſs intelligible, and a great many leſs proper and graceful, than they once were: not to ſay, that the utmoſt Propriety and Accuracy was not in thoſe Days very ſtrictly regarded. Beſides, every Book of the Bible hath, for the Convenience of Quotation, been divided, many Ages after it was written, into Chapters, not always quite ſo judiciouſly ſeparated, as they might have been: and theſe Chapters again into very ſhort Verſes, which Perſons are too apt to conſider as independent Sentences; and thus often miſtake the Meaning, but oftener ſtill overlook the otherwiſe plain Connexion and Force of Argument in the ſacred Writings: perhaps imagine that there is none,

and

and that ſtudying them is to little Purpoſe. Nay laſtly, the very Expoſitors of Scripture, whoſe Profeſſion is to aſſiſt Men in reading it, and whoſe Utility for that Purpoſe, upon the whole, is very conſiderable, yet ſometimes diſcourage them from it. For Commentators, in all Books on which they labour much, and therefore above all in the Bible, on which they have laboured moſt, frequently perplex what without them would be clear enough; either from Partiality to their own Notions, or Vanity of finding out ſomething new, or Deſire of ſeeming to differ from others where they do not, that they may not ſeem to copy them when they do.

All theſe Things contribute to leſſen the Eſteem of the Bible with ſome, perhaps more than is imagined: for though they may ſeldom be propoſed as direct formal Arguments againſt its Uſefulneſs, yet they are ſecretly and artfully thrown into the Scale, ſo as to weigh a great deal on that Side of the Queſtion. And many, who will not allow, or, it may be, do not perceive, that they think the worſe of Scripture for them, yet are kept by them, more or leſs, from the ſerious reading of it. But evidently both Sorts of Perſons act very unreaſonably.

For

For the Original is not in the leaſt anſwerable for the Defects of Tranſlations, or for any other human Imprudences. And though it cannot, by the beſt Tranſlation, appear in all its primitive Splendor; yet in the worſt (and ours is far from being ſuch,) it exhibits every Thing neceſſary to the obtaining of eternal Life, which alone might ſufficiently recommend it to our moſt reverent Reſpect and diligent Meditation. However, beſides this, under its greateſt Diſadvantages, if we attend to it judiciouſly, we ſhall find in it, (as Critics, by no Means prejudiced in its Favour, have confeſſed) far nobler and more ſtriking Beauties, and in far greater Plenty, than in any or all the Writers of Heathen Antiquity.

But the internal Hindrances, (if I may call them ſo) of ſtudying Scripture, have not been the only, or perhaps the chief ones. Others of ſtrong Influence have proceeded from outward and accidental Circumſtances. When reſtoring the Knowledge of it had overthrown the Dominion of Popery over this and ſeveral neighbouring Countries, (an Event, which ought to make it for ever dear to us,) the Spirit of Controverſy, once raiſed on that Subject, was unneceſſarily extended to ſo many others, that the Word

Word of God came to be conſidered by too many in ſcarce any other Light than as furniſhing Materials for Diſputes: and ſo the following Generations began to grow weary of Them and It together. Another Misfortune was, that frequently Men, not the beſt qualified for interpreting even the plainer Parts of it, blinded with new Light, undertook without Fear the moſt difficult; and fathered upon the Bible whatever Abſurdities had ſtarted up in their own Imaginations. Beſides, not a few in the laſt Century, from an Affectation of uncommon Eſteem for it, introduced its peculiar Phraſes on Occaſions of ſo little Dignity, grafted ſo freely ſtill more peculiar ones upon them, and uſed both ſo improperly and unſeaſonably, that others, from Diſguſt of their Language, contracted no ſmall Diſlike to that of Scripture itſelf. Nay, I fear, that the ſacred Writings have not had ſufficient Juſtice done them even in the Pulpit. We are apter to dwell on general Subjects, than to explain particular Paſſages; and afraid to break the Force of a Reaſoning or an Exhortation by intermixing with it the Expoſition of a Text. In ſome Degree this may be right: but I doubt we carry it too far, eſpecially as we have no ſeparate expounding

ing of Scripture, which diſcreetly conducted would be unſpeakably uſeful. And thus the People have been left ſadly ignorant of a great Part of their Bibles. Now theſe Things, coinciding in our Days with a higher Degree, than ever the World knew before, of that Self-Opinion, which deſpiſes the Doctrines of Revelation as irrational, and that Rage for Self-Indulgence of every Kind, which renders its Precepts and Threatenings inſupportable, have produced an abſolute Scorn of it in great Numbers, and a ſtrange Indifference towards it in almoſt all. So that now mere Cuſtom and Faſhion is thought ſufficient to juſtify, and even require, if we are well bred, a total and avowed Neglect of this important Book; without ſpending a Moment on the diſagreeable Examination, what Pleas it hath to urge for being ſtudied as the Law of our Lives.

Yet viſibly theſe Inducements for diſregarding it, are, if poſſible, more groundleſs than the foregoing. Some have made wrong and abſurd Uſes of it. Why ſhould that hinder Us from making the right and wiſe one? Some are conceited, or vicious, or fond of Applauſe from the weakeſt of their Fellow Creatures. Why ſhould not We, notwithſtanding that, be hum-

ble

ble and virtuous, and ſeek the Approbation of our Creator? Let us therefore determine, that neither bad Reaſons nor bad Examples ſhall ever move us to ſlight the holy Scriptures: and carefully diveſting ourſelves of the Prejudices too commonly ariſing from them, let us proceed

2. To hear the divine Commands for reading and honouring it.

Every Manifeſtation of God's Will implies in its very Nature a Command to hearken to it with our deepeſt Attention: and his Words could be written down for no other End, than that all Perſons concerned might peruſe them frequently, and bear them always in Mind. But that none may pretend Ignorance of his Purpoſe, he hath declared it expreſsly. *Moſes* charges the *Iſraelites*: *Behold I have taught you Statutes and Judgements, even as the Lord my God commanded me: take Heed to thyſelf, and keep thy Soul diligently, leſt thou forget them, and they depart from thy Heart: but teach them thy Sons and thy Sons Sons, that they may learn to fear him all the Days that they ſhall live upon the Earth, and that they may teach their Children*[a]. God himſelf charges them: *Lay up*

[a] Deut. iv. 5, 9, 10.

theſe

these my Words in your Heart and in your Soul, and teach them your Children, that your Days may be multiplied, and the Days of your Children [b]. He charges *Joshua* in particular: *This Book of the Law shall not depart out of thy Mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein Day and Night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then shalt thou make thy Way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good Success* [c]. The first Psalm saith the very same Thing of every pious Man: *His Delight is in the Law of the Lord, and in his Law will he exercise himself Day and Night: and whatsoever he doth, it shall prosper* [d]. Nor are we to study the Precepts only, but the rest. *Isaiah*, speaking of the Completion of a Prophecy, directs the People: *Seek ye out of the Book of the Lord, and read* [e]. When the rich Man in the Parable was desirous to prevent his Brethren from coming into the same Place of Torment with himself, *Abraham* said unto him, *They have Moses and the Prophets: let them hear Them* [f]. When the *Jews* were venting their Prejudices against our Saviour, he exhorts them: *Search the Scriptures: for in Them ye think,*

[b] Deut. xi. 18, 19, 21. [c] Josh. i. 8. [d] Ps. i. 2, 4. [e] Is. xxxiv. 16. [f] Luke xvi. 29.

meaning,

meaning, and rightly think, *ye have eternal Life; and they are they, which teſtify of me* [g]. St. *Paul* tells the *Romans*, that *Whatſoever Things were written aforetime were written for our Learning* [h]. Now we cannot queſtion ſurely, but the New Teſtament deſerves equal Attention with the Old. The Proof, which you have had, of its Inſpiration, proves that at the ſame Time. The Goſpels, *written that Men might believe, and believing have Life* [i], muſt be read to produce that Effect. Of the Epiſtles we may judge, by the Care which St. *Paul* took to have His communicated and ſpread. He inſcribes his firſt to the *Corinthians*, not to Them only, but to *all that in every Place call upon the Name of Jeſus Chriſt our Lord* [k]. He requires the *Coloſſians*, when that which he addreſſed to them *is read amongſt them, to cauſe that it be read alſo in the Church of the Laodiceans* [l]. He *charges* the *Theſſalonians by the Lord*, in the firſt Epiſtle, which They had from him, that it *be read unto all the holy Brethren* [m]. Doubtleſs the other Churches too underſtood his Mind in this Matter. And St. *John* in the Beginning of the *Revelation*, a Book that ſeems

[g] John v. 39. [h] Rom. xv. 4. [i] John xx. 31. [k] 1 Cor. i. 2. [l] Col. iv. 16. [m] 1 Theſſ. v. 27.

the leaſt fitted of any for common Uſe, takes Care to ſay, *Bleſſed is He that readeth, and they that hear, the Words of this Prophecy* [n].

Theſe excellent Men could not mean, that only the Chriſtians of that Generation were bound to read their Writings. They knew the following ones would have the ſame and greater Need, in Proportion to their Diſtance. The following ones, for three Centuries and more, knew it themſelves; employed their Thoughts on the ſacred Books principally, carried them about in their Boſoms, gave up their Lives rather than part with them: and ſuch as through Fear delivered them to their Perſecutors to be deſtroyed, were cenſured by the Authority of the Church; and branded, in the common Speech of the Faithful, by the infamous Name of *Traditores*, from which the Word Traitor is derived into our Tongue.

In vain are we told then, that the Scriptures contain Paſſages *hard to be underſtood*, and therefore are not fit for vulgar Inſpection. St. *Peter*, who ſaid they did [o], made no ſuch Inference. The primitive Chriſtians, who experienced it as well as we, never thought nor heard of any ſuch. In our Saviour's Converſation with his

[n] Rev. i. 3. [o] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

Apoſtles

Apoſtles there were Things, extremely hard to be underſtood: ought they then to have been debarred from it? Let us not aim to be wiſer than God. He hath given us his Word, not for a Snare, but for a Light and a Guide. Every Bleſſing which we have, indeed, puts us to ſome Trial: and this tries our Fairneſs of Mind, our Diligence in collecting the Articles of our Faith and Practice, our Gratitude for what he beſtows, our Submiſſion to his good Pleaſure in what he withholds from us. But he that hath engaged us in this Work, if we uſe our faithful Endeavours humbly, will not fail to ſupport us under the Difficulties of it; and the going through it as we ought will be ſuitably rewarded. Were the pretended Dangers therefore, in the Study of Scripture, much greater than they are, yet this is the Method, which God hath appointed for our ſpiritual Improvement; and which having appointed, he will render effectual. Let us truſt him therefore to inſtruct us in his own Way. By the reading and preaching of his Word, however unpromiſing the Means might ſeem, he raiſed up his Church at firſt, notwithſtanding all the Violence of *Jews* and Heathens: and by the ſame he will uphold it for ever, againſt all the Scoffs and Cavils of Infidels. *For*

the Foolishneſs of God is wiſer than Men: and the Weakneſs of God is ſtronger than Men [p]. Our only Concern is to perform the Duty, which he hath commanded: and we ſhall certainly receive the Benefits, which he hath promiſed, each in the Manner and Degree, that his Caſe requires.

But as you have already ſeen the Profitableneſs of Scripture to every Purpoſe of Religion, you have ſeen by Conſequence the Advantages of being converſant in it: and therefore I ſhall now go on to invert the Proſpect, by ſhewing you, as I propoſed,

3. The Evils, which follow from diſregarding the Injunctions of God in Relation to it.

Were thoſe Injunctions in themſelves of no great Moment, yet they come from the Almighty: and refuſing to take Notice of them is loſing the Recompenſe of ſo much Obedience, and incurring the Penalty of ſo much Diſobedience. But they are indeed of Moment unſpeakable, in ſeveral Reſpects. The ſacred Writings are the Source of our religious Knowledge: and without an Acquaintance with them, we ſhall be liable to Ignorance, Uncertainty and Miſtake, even in Points of the greateſt Import-

[p] 1 Cor. i. 25.

ance. Thence arose the false Doctrine of the *Sadducees*, to whom our Saviour says, *Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures* [q]. Nor is the Danger less in Respect of Practice. Neglect of holy Writ must introduce a Neglect of its Author, on more Accounts than one. How shall Persons keep themselves easy in not looking into a Book, which their Maker hath appointed to be written for their Use, and required them to use continually, but by thinking as little and as lowly of him as they can? Therefore they will be strongly tempted to every Thing, that may assist them in such Impiety: and will soon, alas, find themselves able to make large Advances in that high Road to Ruin here and hereafter. Again, Scripture places before Men, in every Page, the most affecting Proofs and Descriptions of the Holiness and Justice, the Wisdom and Power, the Goodness and Mercy, the continual Presence and never ceasing Agency of Him, who is the Creator, the Benefactor, the King and Judge of all. It makes known to us the inexpressible Condescension and Love of our Redeemer, the perfect Reasonableness and Purity of his Law, the Need and Means of obtaining the sanctifying Influences of the blessed

[q] Matt. xxii. 29.

Spirit, the infinite Importance of preparing for our unchangeable State. If then, for Want of attending to Scripture, the Impreſſions of theſe Objects wear out of our Minds, as they muſt; all the Seriouſneſs, which they are fitted to produce, will wear out of them at the ſame Time; ſpiritual and eternal Things will be leſs and leſs in our Thoughts, (conſult your own Hearts, I intreat you, whether you do not find it ſo) till at laſt we ſhall come to live and act as *without God in the World*[r]. Particularly, what we are bound to do and abſtain from is laid down in the Bible much too clearly to be miſunderſtood or evaded. But if once we leave off looking for our Duty there, we ſhall ſoon mould it within our own Minds into what Shape and Size we pleaſe, till we bring it in Effect to nothing. For even ſuppoſing, that we begin our Neglect with no ſuch Intention at all, yet bad Inclinations will creep in upon us, one after another; and not meeting with the proper Check, will increaſe and multiply, we cannot eaſily ſuſpect beforehand to what Degree.

It will be ſaid perhaps, that reading other good Books, which are ſhorter and clearer, may ſupply the Omiſſion of reading Scripture, poſſi-

[r] Eph. ii. 12.

bly

bly on the whole to Advantage. But they, who once grow weary of the latter, ſeldom, I believe, continue long to make any conſiderable Uſe of the former: and therefore this Plea, for the moſt Part, is only a Pretence. Or were it ſincere, as unqueſtionably it ſometimes is, other Books have not, and cannot have, the Authority in what they affirm, in what they require, in what they promiſe and threaten, that the Word of God hath: *the Word*, which our Saviour hath declared *ſhall judge us in the laſt Day*[a]. Joined with this, and confirmed by it, the Compoſitions of Men are of great Efficacy: but when they are ſeparated from it, the Caſe is unſpeakably altered. We ſhall be apt to pay as little Regard, as we think fit, to mere human Writers: and overlook, or call in Queſtion, whatever we do not like. Yet ſometimes again we ſhall be in Danger of paying them too much Regard, and ſo being led by them into falſe Notions, which may give us Uneaſineſs without Need, or Comfort without Ground; or into ſuperſtitious Practices, which may diſcredit our holy Profeſſion. What followed in the middle Ages of Chriſtianity when Men left off and were diſcouraged from reading the Word

[a] John xii. 48.

of Truth, but that they were *turned unto Fables*[t]? Lying Legends were believed: Pictures and Images were firſt gazed at for Inſtruction, then worſhipped. They *forſook the Fountain of living Waters, and hewed them out broken Ciſterns, that held no Water*[u], but Draughts of Poiſon: whereas what we learn in Scripture, we learn from the Spring-Head; and not only every Thing it teaches is right, but its very Silence is inſtructive. For if any Thing is not made there a neceſſary Part of our Faith or Practice, no Power on Earth hath a Right to make it ſo: and had but Believers invariably kept to this Book, as their Rule; all the Corruptions of Chriſtianity, and all the Wickedneſs of every Kind, produced by thoſe Corruptions, had been happily prevented. Beſides, were we to embrace every Thing right, and nothing wrong, that we find in other pious Treatiſes; yet there is a peculiar Energy in holy Writ, which is not in Them. Its Denunciations are more awful, its Convictions ſtronger, its Conſolations more authentic, its Warnings more alarming, its Expoſtulations more penetrating. The bare Reflection, who it is that ſpeaks, cannot fail to make them ſo in a very conſiderable Degree:

[t] 2 Tim. iv. 4. [u] Jer. ii. 13.

and

and he hath added a ſupernatural Force to them over and above. *Is not my Word like as a Fire, ſaith the Lord, and like a Hammer that breaketh the Rock in Pieces* [w]*? The Word of God is quick and powerful, and ſharper than any two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing aſunder of Soul and Spirit, and of the Joints and Marrow, and is a Diſcerner of the Thoughts and Intents of the Heart* [x]. Whence accordingly the efficacious and converting Preacher, is He, *not* who comes *with inticing Words of Man's Wiſdom* [y], but who, like *Apollos*, is *mighty in the Scriptures* [z]. *He that hath my Word, let him ſpeak my Word faithfully: what is the Chaff to the Wheat? ſaith the Lord* [a].

But farther: By omitting to read and conſider the original Charter of our Religion, from which our whole Knowledge of it is derived, Perſons will be unacquainted with the Language of Religion. And hence they will firſt blindly ſtumble and cavil at the Phraſes of Scripture, not knowing them to be ſuch: and afterwards learn to deſpiſe them, though they do know it. The Offices of the Liturgy, eſpecially the occaſional ones, that recur ſeldomer, will ſeem

[w] Jer. xxiii. 29. [x] Heb. iv. 12. [y] 1 Cor. ii. 4.
[z] Acts xviii. 24. [a] Jer. xxiii. 28.

ſtrange

ſtrange and unaccountable to them. They will repeat the Pſalms in the Congregation abſolutely without meaning; neither ſaying in their own Perſons, or applying to their own Uſe, the Things that ſuit them; nor thinking at all, to what Sort of Perſons, or good Purpoſes, the reſt relates. They will hardly ever pay Attention to the Leſſons, Epiſtles and Goſpels, but look upon them as Pauſes and Breaks in the Service, to be filled up as they pleaſe; or if they do hearken to them, yet not underſtanding many Parts of them, will receive little Benefit from them; and poſſibly miſunderſtanding ſome, will receive Harm: entertaining injurious Opinions of the ſacred Oracles from what they hear out of them, in this imperfect Manner, inſtead of the honourable and uſeful Sentiments, which would have been revived in their Breaſts, had they applied themſelves beforehand to an orderly Peruſal of them with proper Care. Then as to Sermons, on which commonly the chief Reliance for Inſtruction is, they, who are not ſufficiently verſed in the Bible at Home, will be unable to judge of the Proofs we bring from it here, or the general Conformity of our Preaching to it. And elſewhere they will be miſled by the Sound of ſcriptural Words, uſed in a

Senſe

Senſe which the Writers never intended; and ſo be like *Children toſſed to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the Sleight of Men and cunning Craftineſs, whereby they lie in wait to deceive* [b]. Now it is not our Deſire to impoſe on your Ignorance, but to appeal to your Knowledge. We wiſh, we beſeech you, to imitate the *Bereans*, commended ſo juſtly in the *Acts of the Apoſtles*, as *more noble than thoſe in Theſſalonica, in that they received the Word with all Readineſs of Mind, and ſearched the Scriptures daily, whether thoſe Things were ſo.* It follows, *Therefore many of them believed* [c]; effectually no Doubt.

Another very important Uſe of ſearching the Scripture is, that in the Midſt of that Deluge of evil Communication, which overflows this wicked Land, to a Degree that no Country, calling itſelf Chriſtian, ever experienced before, few Perſons can avoid hearing, more or leſs, unfair and even ludicrous Repreſentations made of one Part or other of God's Word; which may be too likely to paſs upon them for juſt ones, unleſs they are previouſly ſo well ſkilled in it, as either to know in particular the true Vindication of the Paſſages abuſed, or at leaſt

[b] Eph. iv. 14. [c] Acts xvii. 11, 12.

to

to know in general, that it cannot be liable to the Imputations, which profane People would caſt upon it, becauſe the Spirit of the whole is inconſiſtent with their Suggeſtions. If indeed they themſelves would but take the Trouble of underſtanding what they take the Liberty of burleſquing, it would ſave them the Guilt of many a blaſphemous Reflection, and the Shame of many a ſilly Jeſt. But at leaſt Perſons of better Diſpoſitions will ſurely be perſuaded to ſo rational a Method of guarding againſt the Infection of their pernicious Irreverence. Poſſibly ſome will reply, that irreligious Thoughts and Temptations to Unbelief may ariſe from what occurs to us in reading the Bible ourſelves, as well as from what others occaſionally ſay of it. But certainly the Danger is far leſs: and the greateſt Part of that may be prevented by obſerving ſuch Rules for the ſafe and uſeful Performance of this Duty, as Perſons, one ſhould imagine, would of Courſe lay down for themſelves, or at leaſt will ſee to be reaſonable, when propoſed to them; as, God willing, they ſhall be to you the very next Opportunity. And if ſtill any Difficulty and Trial remain, yet coming in our Way, when our Minds are in a ſerious and conſiderate State, diſpoſed to examine

examine impartially and reverently, as in the Preſence of God, and to beg, that his *Spirit* would *guide us into all Truth*[d]; there will be no Doubt of obtaining, on due Inquiry, competent Satisfaction.

I ſhall only ſay this farther, to ſhew the Evil of neglecting the ſacred Writings, that They are what makes us to differ from *the Gentiles, which know not God*[e], for even our natural Religion is borrowed from them; and they can be uſeful only by being read: that when the Church of *Rome* had almoſt ſuppreſſed them, Chriſtianity was buried under Falſehood, Superſtition and Wickedneſs; and when they were reſtored to common Uſe, true Piety, Virtue and Liberty, were reſtored by their Means: that thoſe Nations and thoſe Perſons, who attend to them with the higheſt Reſpect, are the moſt ſincerely, the moſt ſteadily good: and that in Proportion as We of this Nation have diſregarded them, we have grown unſettled in our Faith even of what Reaſon teaches, profligate in our Behaviour, unmindful of public or private real Welfare, and viſibly ripe for ſpeedy Deſtruction.

[d] John xvi. 13. [e] 1 Theſſ. iv. 5.

Let

Let us all therefore inſtantly return to the right Way, before it is too late. The pooreſt of us, if he hath not a Bible, may have one, either by Purchaſe, for he lays out much more in a few Weeks on Matters of far leſs Neceſſity, or by the charitable Gift of ſome pious Benefactor. And the buſieſt of us may and muſt find Time for every Branch of the *one Thing needful* [f]. Every Perſon hath at leaſt ſeveral Hours of the Lord's Day, and ſome little Share of others, for the Exerciſes of Religion: But many of us have much more Leiſure; not all of it perhaps innocently, and a great deal of it not prudently, employed. Spending a due Part of it on the divine Law would both diſpoſe and enable us to ſpend the reſt, whether devoted to worldly Affairs or to Relaxations, with truer Cheerfulneſs now, and to a better Account at the great Day. We have moſt of us at Times heavy Sufferings: and poor Supports are any others, that we can uſe under them, compared with theirs, who *by Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures have Hope* [g]. The moſt cautious of us have frequently violent Aſſaults from our ſpiritual Enemy: and we cannot arm ourſelves againſt him more effectually,

[f] Luke x. 42. [g] Rom. xv. 4.

than,

than, as our Lord himſelf did, with *the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God* [h]. The ſtrongeſt of us have ſad Remains of Weakneſs, the diſcreeteſt of Injudiciouſneſs: and the ſureſt Remedy for both is that of the Son of *Sirach: Let thy Mind be upon the Ordinances of the Lord, and meditate continually in his Commandments: He ſhall eſtabliſh thine Heart, and give thee Wiſdom at thine own Deſire* [i].

[h] Eph. vi. 17. [i] Eccluſ. vi. 37.

SERMON V.

2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

All Scripture is given by Inſpiration of God: and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs: that the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works.

I HAVE ſhewn you, in ſeveral Diſcourſes on this Text, the Divine Authority of Scripture, its complete Uſefulneſs to all the Purpoſes of Religion, and the conſequent Duty of reading it. Yet ſtill I am ſenſible an unhappy Objection may remain with too many, that they have tried, and do not experience this Uſefulneſs; and why it ſhould be their Duty to perſiſt in reading what they do not find attended with any good Effects, they cannot apprehend. But if they have not read as they

ought, their whole Argument falls to the Ground. Nothing is to be expected from the wrong Performance of any Duty: and therefore I propoſed originally

IV. To give Directions for the right Performance of this.

Many proper ones, I hope, have been intimated to you not obſcurely, under the former Heads: Part of which however I ſhall now repeat amongſt others. For to ſay again *the ſame Things, to me is not grievous, and for you it is ſafe*[a].

That we ſhould come to the Word of God with ſerious Minds, is a Requiſite, that one ſhould hardly have thought needful to mention, if there were not ſome, who give little other Proof of ever having looked into it, than perverting the Expreſſions of it to ludicrous Purpoſes, and ſo extracting Poiſon from the Bread of Life. You need not be told, that ſuch can receive no Improvement from it: but only be warned againſt ſuffering them to infect you with the ſame Diſtemper: for to Men of a gay and lively Turn it is often very catching. But reflect: Every Book in the World, of every Sort, may eaſily be turned into Matter of Di-

[a] Phil. iii. 1.

verſion, if People are reſolved to ſhew at any Rate, ſome their Ability, and others, (which is far the more uſual Caſe) their Deſire only, of being witty. But eſpecially on ſacred Subjects, the Corruptneſs of Mens Hearts diſpoſes them both to invent and receive ſuch Kind of Entertainment with peculiar Eagerneſs: for this very Reaſon principally, that they know they ought not. And beſides, the Old and New Teſtament do lie ſomewhat opener to profane Abuſe, than many other pious Compoſitions, from the Difference of Stile and Manners in diſtant Ages and Countries, from the ſcrupulous Exactneſs of our Tranſlation, and the Changes in our Language, that have happened ſince it was made. But ſurely there are ſtrong Motives, of Religion, of Prudence, of common Decency, to reſtrain Men, from taking ſuch unfair Advantages, to ſo bad an End; if this contemptible Affectation of appearing ingenious, by forcing a Laugh out of every Thing, did not ſo effectually deſtroy, as it doth, all Regard to Rightneſs of Behaviour and true good Senſe. *A Scorner ſeeketh Wiſdom, and findeth it not: but Knowledge is eaſy to him, that conſidereth* [b].

[b] Prov. xiv. 6. It is wrongly tranſlated, *underſtandeth.*

Let us therefore never permit ourſelves to make, either in Thought, at the Time of reading the Scripture, or in Diſcourſe afterwards, a light and burleſque Application of any Text: for how little Harm ſoever we may intend, the Practice is plainly unfit and irreverent: beſides that we are ſoon led on from ſmall Freedoms to greater. And let us never be influenced to think ill or meanly of the leaſt Part of God's Word from any ſuch Applications made by others: for they prove nothing againſt Scripture, but much againſt thoſe who invent or uſe them. Or if we find, that, notwithſtanding, they do in Fact begin to make Impreſſions upon us, as they may imperceptibly, if we are not on the Watch; let us avoid, as carefully, yet as inoffenſively, as we can, the Company of thoſe, who delight in ſuch dangerous Converſation: according to *Solomon*'s excellent Rule, *Ceaſe, my Son, to hear the Inſtruction, that cauſeth to err from the Words of Knowledge* [c]. For as to any Hope of Good from arguing with them, no People upon Earth are ſo incapable of being convinced or ſilenced by Reaſon, as they that are conceited of a libertine Wit. And therefore, however entertaining their Talk may be

[c] Prov. xix. 27.

otherwiſe,

otherwiſe, yet being eſſentially faulty in this Reſpect, let us conſider it only in the ſtrong, but juſt Light, in which St. *Paul* places the idle Diſcourſe of ſome in his own Days, when he ſaith, *But ſhun profane and vain Babblings: for they will increaſe unto more Ungodlineſs; and their Word will eat, as doth a Canker* [d]. They, whoſe Learning and Judgement and Taſte and Worth are the moſt univerſally acknowledged, have, in all Times down to our own, ſpoken and thought of the Bible with the higheſt Degree of honourable Regard. And it is no leſs abſurd, than impious, to be hurried into deſpiſing and ridiculing it, either by the extravagant Flights of any Man's wild Fancy, or the graver Authority of Judges ſo evidently prejudiced, as the ſelf-ſufficient, or the diſſolute, merely becauſe they are grown of late more numerous and leſs modeſt. Let us at leaſt obſerve a little firſt, what good Effects this new Kind of Wiſdom produces in the Lives and Families of thoſe, who are ſo fond of it; and wait a while to ſee, (if indeed it be not too viſible already,) what Sort of Figure they themſelves, and a Nation compoſed of them, or led by them, make and

[d] 2 Tim. ii. 16, 17.

are likely to make in the Eyes of the preſent and future Ages.

With due Serioufneſs we are to join due Reverence in reading Scripture: and *receive it, not as the Word of Men, but, as it is in Truth, the Word of God*[e]; and therefore credible. The Revelation, which he hath given us, cannot indeed contradict the Reaſon, which he hath given us: and therefore we muſt never conſtrue it irrationally. But it may eaſily contradict our fanciful Notions and favourite Conjectures: in which Caſe we are to *caſt down Imaginations and every high Thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the Knowledge of God, and bring into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Chriſt*[f].

Nor is it leſs our Duty to ſubject all our vicious Inclinations to the Authority of holy Writ, than our vain Prejudices. For if we indulge but one, it will naturally biaſs us to reject, or miſinterpret, whatever is inconſiſtent with it: and beſides, we ſhall loſe the Hope of that Illumination, without which we can apprehend nothing to good Purpoſe. Whence the Angel ſaith to *Daniel, None of the Wicked ſhall underſtand; but the Wiſe ſhall underſtand*[g]. And our Saviour promiſes only[h], that *If any Man will*

[e] 1 Theſſ. ii. 13. [f] 2 Cor. x. 5. [g] Dan. xii. 10. [h] John vii. 17.

do

do the Will of God, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.

But with whatever good Diſpoſitions we may read the Scripture, unleſs we read it alſo attentively, we ſhall fail of our End. If we perform it only as a Taſk, we ſhall find it a weariſome one. If we conſider ſpending ſo much Time in it, without Care to improve by it, as a Work acceptable to God on its own Account: this is cheating ourſelves with a falſe and ſuperſtitious Notion of Piety: and much more ſo, if we imagine, that employing one Part of the Day thus will in the leaſt atone for doing, in any other Part, what we are forbidden.

Now attentive Reading will preſent to our View a Variety of Things, that will affect us very differently. And the Benefit or the Harm we ſhall receive from them, (for we may receive either,) will greatly depend on the Conduct, which we obſerve amidſt them. If we have never been uſed to read the Bible, or have long diſuſed it; ſome Paſſages in it will probably ſeem very ſtrange to us at firſt: as undoubtedly the whole Frame of Nature, and the whole Tenor of Providence would ſeem, were we let into our preſent Knowledge of it all at once, inſtead of being made acquainted with it by ſlow

Degrees. They therefore, who come with a Diſpoſition to object and cavil, may have abundant Room to exerciſe it. They, who inſiſt on being ſatisfied in all Particulars, will be greatly diſappointed in many. For every one muſt not hope to diſcover whatever may be diſcovered. Or if he could, moſt of our Inquiries into the Scheme of Religion, revealed or natural, as well as into the Conſtitution of the material World, if purſued to the utmoſt, will at Length terminate in ſomething which we do not and cannot know. So that Men muſt prepare themſelves for what they will be ſure to meet with; muſt expect to find ſome dark, and ſome hard Sayings. On theſe they muſt never put a bad Senſe; but are neither to be offended at all, nor wonder much, if ſometimes they are at a Loſs how to put any: but believe implicitly, (for this is Faith in God, not Man,) that there is ſome, worthy of the reſt: and not think of forſaking their Guide to Heaven, merely becauſe they perceive not the Deſign or Propriety of every Sentence, that he ſpeaks to them on the Road. In ſhort, they muſt reaſon and reſolve, if Need be, like the holy Apoſtles in the ſixth of St. *John:* who were doubtleſs perplexed and ſtaggered not a little at our Saviour's Diſcourſe, recorded there; but when *many of his Diſciples*

went

went back upon it, *and walked no more with him*, and *Jeſus ſaid unto the twelve, Will ye alſo go away? Simon Peter anſwered him, Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life*[1].

Perſons thus rightly diſpoſed will immediately ſee farther, that as they are not to be diſguſted with Scripture, becauſe they cannot account for every Thing, or underſtand every Thing, to their Wiſh; ſo neither are they to ſtudy it merely to underſtand as much of it as they can, which is only indulging an unedifying Curioſity; and yet leſs, to underſtand more of it than others, which is nurſing up Vanity, and may tempt them to invent new and even dangerous Meanings, in order to ſeem more knowing than they are. But their Buſineſs is, to apply to thoſe Points firſt, and dwell on thoſe moſt, which have the cloſeſt Connexion with their future Happineſs: for They are neceſſary; the reſt are only, in their ſeveral Degrees, uſeful. And as right Practice is the End of Faith; and the firmeſt and moſt explicit Faith, which doth not produce it, is nothing; and a weak and general Faith, which doth produce it, will be accepted: the practical Paſſa-

[1] John vi. 66, 67, 68.

ges

ges ought certainly to have our principal Regard; ever comprehending thoſe, which expreſs the Obligations of Chriſtian Piety and moral Self-government, as well as Juſtice and Mercy. We ſhall indeed do very well, beſides occaſional Readings of particular Chapters, to peruſe both Teſtaments in their Order: only it will be adviſable to begin with, and go oftener through, the New; as exhibiting what we are to believe and to do, more fully, and without ſuch a Mixture, as there is in the Old, of Things belonging ſolely to the former Diſpenſation. But then the Regularity of this Courſe ought not to hinder us from ſelecting chiefly, and peruſing moſt frequently, ſuch Paſſages of both, as lay before us, in the moſt influencing Manner, the common Doctrines and common Duties of our holy Profeſſion. Other Things may with Safety be lightly paſſed over, and imperfectly or not at all underſtood, till we are firſt well ſettled in theſe: which very happily are the plainer Parts of Scripture, as well as the more important.

Still even in Reſpect of theſe, and much more therefore of others, it is requiſite, that we proceed with ſome Judgement and Care: that we make Uſe of the ſame Rules for underſtanding our Bibles, which we do for underſtanding

ſtanding other Books; and ſuch alſo, as the peculiar Nature of this Book points out: that we never interpret any Text in a Senſe contrary to the Dictates of Reaſon, or to other Texts more clear or more numerous, or to the viſible Deſign and Drift of the whole Paſſage: that we keep always in our View what goes before and follows after; for the Connexion is often very ſtrong, where it is not extremely obvious: that we ſuppoſe not every Verſe to be a ſeparate Sentence of itſelf; nor every Chapter to have a ſeparate Subject, that begins and ends with it; for theſe Diviſions are intirely human, and ſometimes not diſcreetly made; but that we read on without ſtopping, as far, and no farther, than the ſame Matter appears to be continued: and, (which is a Direction of great Moment) that we apply the Sayings of the holy Penmen, only to the Things of which they are treating, not to others, which perhaps were far from their Thoughts; unleſs a juſt Argument can be drawn from the former to the latter. We ſhould alſo be careful to take both ſingle Words, and Phraſes comprehending ſeveral, not always in the Meaning which they bear in our daily Converſation, but in ſuch as other Places of Scripture require or permit: underſtanding them literally where we can, but figuratively where

we

we muſt: ſhould make ſuch Abatements from ſtrong Expreſſions, ſuch Reſtrictions and Exceptions to general Expreſſions, and ſuch Allowances for the whole Manner of ſpeaking, as we perceive the Nature of the Thing, together with the Uſage and Cuſtom of the ſacred Writers, demands. Without ſuch Equity as this, in ſome Degree, one half of the Compoſitions, that appear in the World, would be Heaps of Abſurdity. And if the Bible needs more of it, than later Books of nearer Countries, it alſo deſerves it infinitely better: and refuſing it is both Perverſeneſs and Impiety. Theſe eaſy Cautions will enable Perſons of almoſt the loweſt Capacity and Improvements, that either can read Scripture, or have the Means of hearing it read, to acquire ſo competent a Knowledge of what is moſt needful to be known, as will fully juſtify the Pſalmiſt's Encomium, that *the Teſtimony of the Lord is ſure, making wiſe the Simple*[k].

Not that even the Learned, and much leſs the Illiterate, act either with Humility or Prudence, if in reading holy Writ they rely wholly on their own Judgement unaſſiſted. For God hath made the Help of others extremely neceſſary to our Underſtanding of his Word, as

[k] Pſ. xix. 7.

well

well as his Works. Men of great Abilities and Attainments, by truſting to themſelves, have gone ſadly wrong: and Men of no other Advantages, than a teachable Diſpoſition, have arrived at a moſt beneficial Acquaintance with religious Truths. For God *hides Things from the Wiſe and Prudent* in their own Opinion, which he *reveals unto Babes*[l]: *reſiſteth the Proud, but giveth Grace unto the Humble*[m]. Nor let it be imagined, that ſuch muſt therefore depend altogether in every Thing on the Authority of their ſpiritual Guides. For as in Matters of Science, or common Buſineſs, what a Man doth not ſee of himſelf, he may have ſhewn him notwithſtanding, and then ſee it as truly and fully, as if it had been his own original Diſcovery: ſo in Matters of Revelation, one, who would otherwiſe have made ſmall Progreſs, or, it may be, great Miſtakes, yet having the main Articles of it methodically explained to him, in Diſcourſes on his Catechiſm, and occaſionally inculcated in Sermons, or Anſwers to the Queſtions which he aſks in private, may, by comparing what he is thus taught, with what he reads in his Bible, come by Degrees, not to believe implicitely, but to diſcern

[l] Matt. xi. 25. Luke x. 21. [m] James iv. 6.

evidently, the genuine Senſe of its fundamental Doctrines and Precepts. In which Caſe, his Faith reſts no longer on the Word of Man, but that of God, whether we can anſwer all the ſpecious Objections againſt it or not: which few People can do in any Thing that they believe of any Kind. We ſhould therefore conſcientiouſly take all fit Opportunities of learning Inſtruction from thoſe, who are ſet apart to give it. For the *Prieſt's Lips* are appointed to *keep Knowledge*; and the People to *ſeek the Law at his Mouth*[n]: not with a blind Submiſſion to whatever he ſhall affirm; but with ſo much Regard at leaſt, as in other Profeſſions the more ignorant pay to the more ſkilful. Nor are we confined to reſpect only the Sentiments of the particular Teachers, whom we ſtatedly attend, but ought to have much greater Deference for the general Perſuaſion of Chriſt's Church, particularly our own Branch of it, and a proportionable one for that of every knowing and good Perſon; always entertaining ſome Diſtruſt of ourſelves, when we differ from theſe. The Exerciſe of our beſt Judgement, and a modeſt Attention to that of others, are the joint Means, which our Maker hath

[n] Mal. ii. 7.

inſtituted

inſtituted for the Underſtanding of his Will, natural and revealed. They, who uſe them uprightly, and they alone, may hope for Pardon of their Ignorance and Errors. And were any one to continue ſo ignorant to the laſt, as to believe the Truths contained in holy Writ, only becauſe thoſe about him told him they were ſuch: yet might he have the Happineſs of acquiring even by the Means of this moſt implicit Faith, Diſpoſitions of Piety and Virtue unattainable otherwiſe, and ſufficient to qualify him for eternal Happineſs.

But ſometimes Chriſtians of a deeper Inſight, real or imaginary, into Scripture, inſtead of complaining, like others, that neceſſary Doctrines and Precepts are not clear enough there, are tempted to think them expreſſed ſo much more familiarily, and repeated ſo much oftener than needed, that the Places, in which they are inculcated thus, may be paſſed over, as not deſigned for ſuch, as They are. Now would they but conſider even the leaſt entertaining of them for a competent Time, with a Spirit of Seriouſneſs, there would ſtart out of them Information or Admonition, of which they little think, and for which they have great Occaſion. Or ſhould they find nothing that is new to them,

they

they would at leaſt have Cauſe given them to recollect with humble Thankfulneſs, not only that their Chriſtian Brethren do, and *are made wiſe unto Salvation* [p] by theſe deſpiſed plain Paſſages, and by theſe only, but that from Them, above the reſt, proceeded all that Knowledge of the Redemption of Man, and almoſt all that Knowledge of natural Religion alſo, which the moſt learned enjoy; and which hath made even the vulgar of the Goſpel Diſpenſation ſuperior to the ableſt and beſt inſtructed amongſt the Heathen: a Superiority, which will be loſt again, in Proportion as Regard to the Word of God decays.

But though, in reading it, we muſt all begin with attending, and ever after attend chiefly, to the firſt Elements of Chriſtian Inſtruction, or, to ſpeak in St. *Peter*'s Language, *as new born Babes deſire the ſincere Milk of the Word, that we may grow thereby* [q]; and know it for a bad Sign, if we cannot reliſh the Food of ſimpleſt Taſte, and eaſieſt Digeſtion: yet keeping to this wholly is the Buſineſs of thoſe alone, who, as the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* expreſſes it, *are unſkilful*, or rather, *unexperienced, in the Word of Righteouſneſs*; which hath in it

[p] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [q] 1 Pet. ii. 2.

alſo

alſo *ſtrong Meat, belonging to them that are of full Age, who, by Reaſon of Uſe, have their Senſes exerciſed to diſcern both Good and Evil*[r]. We ſhall thrive beſt by the Uſe of lighter Nouriſhment firſt: and mixing the more ſolid with it prematurely may both check our Growth, and hurt our Health. But when we have acquired a due Firmneſs and Vigour, we ſhall both preſerve and increaſe it, by feeding on other Things likewiſe, throughout the Scripture: the ſeveral Parts of which I ſhall briefly go over once again for your completer Direction.

The Hiſtorical Books of the Old Teſtament may be read careleſsly with as little Improvement, as any other Hiſtory. But therefore to prevent this, we are to reflect as we go along: and obſerve, according to the Nature of each Article, how it ſets before us the Sovereignty, the Superintendency, the Wiſdom, the Juſtice, the Mercy of God; the Amiableneſs and Rewards of good Actions, the Deformity and Puniſhment of wicked ones; the Heights of Piety and Virtue, at which the Saints of old Time arrived, as We may by imitating them; the dreadful Sins into which they ſometimes fell,

[r] Heb. v. 13, 14.

as we ſhall, if we take not Warning. For *all theſe Things happened to Them for Enſamples; and they are written for our Admonition*[s]. As to the Danger, which may ariſe from the bad Deeds of good Perſons, related without Cenſure, and Actions that ſeem unwarrantable, yet are told with Approbation, and were therefore either done by God's extraordinary Commiſſion, or grounded on Circumſtances, of which we are not well apprized: I have ſpoken of theſe in a former Diſcourſe; and ſhewn you, that, in ſuch Circumſtances, the Precepts, not the Hiſtories of the Bible, muſt be our Rule.

In the Book of *Job*, ſome Parts are highly poetical, and proportionably dark: for which Reaſon our Attention muſt be chiefly paid to thoſe others, which will amply recompenſe it, by exhibiting the nobleſt and moſt pleaſing Views of the Majeſty of the Almighty, of the patriarchal Religion, of the exquiſite Beauties of Humanity and Charity, of the hard Struggle of human Virtue with heavy Afflictions, and God's gracious Acceptance of imperfect Endeavours. *Ye have heard of the Patience of Job: and have ſeen the End of the Lord; that he is very pitiful, and of tender Mercy*[t].

[s] 1 Cor. x. 11. [t] James v. 11.

As

As to the *Pſalms:* I have already explained to you the Nature of thoſe, which contain Imprecations. Of repeating them all in the Church, I ſhall, God willing, ſpeak ſome other Time. Of reading them in private, I need only ſay, that with the Exerciſe of but a common Degree of Judgement, every pious Perſon will find it equally improving and delightful.

The *Proverbs* have ſcarce any Obſcurity, and much Uſe. Concerning *Eccleſiaſtes* and the *Song of Solomon*, you have had, I hope, ſufficient Inſtructions for peruſing them with Benefit.

The Prophetical Writings abound in difficult Paſſages; but ſtill more in plain ones, expreſſing the ſublimeſt Notions of Piety and Morals, the ſtrongeſt Preference of inward Goodneſs to outward Obſervances, the awfulleſt Denunciations againſt Wickedneſs of every Kind, the moſt affectionate Expoſtulations, the moſt inviting Promiſes, the warmeſt and juſteſt Concern for public Good: which the Prophets manifeſted with ſo fearleſs and impartial a Freedom, in telling both the Body of the People, and the higheſt in Authority, their Duty and their Sins, that the Deſcendants of thoſe, who perſecuted them when living, held their Memories, when dead, in eternal Honour; doubly

convinced of their Miſſion from Heaven, by the Accompliſhment of their Predictions, and the ſingular Worthineſs of their Conduct. In reading them therefore we muſt diligently attend to theſe intereſting Points, each in its proper Place: obſerving alſo, along with them, the gradual Unfolding of the great Scheme of our Redemption; to which *we ſhall do well*, even in theſe Days of *opener Viſion* [v], *to take Heed, as to a Light ſhining in a dark Place* [w]; eſpecially as it confirms to us, that *known unto God are all his Works from the Beginning* [x]. Such Paſſages in their Books, as relate to the Affairs of diſtant heathen Countries in Ages long ago paſt, though of admirable Uſe then, and not a little ſtill as Parallels, we are neither likely nor concerned to underſtand fully. And ſuch as belong to Things yet future, eſpecially to the Times and Circumſtances of thoſe Things, are few, if any, of them fit for the Unlearned to pry into particularly. Nay, the Learned themſelves, if they are prudent alſo, will obſerve, what Anſwer the Angel gave to the Prophet *Daniel*. *And I heard, but I underſtood not: then ſaid I, O my Lord, what ſhall be the End of theſe Things? And he ſaid, Go thy Way, Da-*

[v] 1 Sam. iii. 1. [w] 2 Pet. i. 19. [x] Acts xv. 18.

niel:

niel: for the Words are closed up, and sealed till the Time of the End [y]. When the proper Season comes, possibly in some Cases not before the Event hath interpreted them, the Prophecies will prove their own Reality by their Clearness; and strengthen, perhaps in an Hour of much Need, *the Faith and Patience of the Saints* [z]: Thus it happened to the Apostles. They understood not beforehand our Saviour's Prediction, *Destroy this Temple, and in three Days I will raise it up.* But *when he was risen from the Dead, they remembered, that he had said this unto them: and they believed the Scripture, and the Word which Jesus had said* [a].

But almost the whole of the *Gospels* is now so clear, and both the Character and the Precepts of our blessed Lord appear in them so truly divine; the Zeal and Charity of the first Disciples in the *Acts* is so highly edifying, the Spirit of the *Epistles* so genuinely Christian, and their practical Rules are so completely instructive to all Sorts of Persons; that scarce any other Direction can be wanted for the Main of the New Testament, than to meditate on it continually. Some of the argumentative and occasional Parts of St. *Paul*'s Writings indeed

[y] Dan. xii. 8, 9. [z] Rev. xiii. 10. [a] John ii. 19, 22.

it is not eaſy to comprehend. A yet larger Proportion of the *Revelation* of *St. John* is exceedingly myſterious. But nothing of this Kind, in any Part of Scripture, needs either to diſcourage, or miſlead us. Not to diſcourage us; for whatever is requiſite to be underſtood, if it be put in one Place obſcurely, is doubtleſs put in ſome other plainly: nor to miſlead us, becauſe we may prudently ſuſpend our Judgement, and modeſtly be content with our Ignorance of what is intended, though fully ſatisfied of its being a valuable Truth. *Seek not out*, ſaith the Son of *Sirach*, *the Things that are too hard for thee, neither ſearch the Things that are above thy Strength: But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with Reverence: for it is not needful for thee to ſee with thine Eyes the Things that are in ſecret. Be not curious in unneceſſary Matters: for more Things are ſhewed unto thee, than Men underſtand* [b].

Yet we are not to omit reading the abſtruſer Texts, which have any Appearance of relating to us: but follow the Example of the bleſſed Virgin, who *underſtood not* ſeveral of our Saviour's *Sayings*, yet *kept them all in her Heart* [c]. Were we only to learn Humility thus, it would

[b] Eccluſ. iii. 21, 22, 23. [c] Luke ii. 50, 51.

be

be enough; but we ſhall come by Degrees to apprehend far more than we expected, if we diligently *compare ſpiritual Things with ſpiritual*[d]; darker Expreſſions with clearer, that are like or oppoſite to them: for Contraries illuſtrate one another. In this laudable Work, the marginal References in the later Editions of the Bible will afford you moſt uſeful Aſſiſtance: for they are very judiciouſly choſen. Such Information alſo as you can get, (and you may get much from ſeveral Books,) of the Nature of the Language of each Teſtament, and the Hiſtory and Notions of the Times, when each Book of it was written, will be extremely profitable: and the ſeveral excellent Commentaries and Paraphraſes on the whole, or particular Parts of it, ſtill more: which therefore it is wonderful that ſo few Chriſtians in Proportion, of thoſe who are well able, will be at the Expence of purchaſing for themſelves; eſpecially conſidering how very much greater Expences, that will turn either to no Account or a bad one, they ſo little grudge, that they cannot be reſtrained from them.

But how ſucceſsfully ſoever we may increaſe our Knowledge of Scripture, that alone is no-

[d] 1 Cor. ii. 13.

thing. We muſt not think we have done with a Paſſage as ſoon as we have underſtood it. If we had underſtood it inſtantly, our principal Work was to come yet: and they are ſtrangely wrong, who apply ſo cloſely to ſtudy difficult Places, that they forget to make due Reflections on the plain. The Word of God was written to give us, not merely a ſpeculative Apprehenſion, but an experimental Senſe and Feeling of holy Things, comfortable or terrifying, as our ſpiritual State requires. *I rejoice at thy Word, as one that findeth great Spoil*, ſaith the Pſalmiſt [e]. *To this Man will I look, ſaith the Lord, even to Him that is poor and of a contrite Spirit, and that trembleth at my Word* [f]. Too many, alas, have no Conception of this Efficacy in Scripture: and no Wonder, for they have never ſeriouſly endeavoured to have any. But let them try in Earneſt, and they will infallibly ſucceed, if they uſe proper Means. We read of ſome, what will be true of all in the ſame Condition, that *the Word did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith* [g]. God indeed can operate according to his own Pleaſure: but humanly ſpeaking, Perſons will not be influenced by what they diſbelieve; or much, by what they believe but

[e] Pſ. cxix. 162. [f] Iſ. lxvi. 2. [g] Heb. iv. 2.

faintly.

faintly. Nay ſhould they labour to make the ſtrongeſt Impreſſions on their own Souls, without applying to Him, whoſe *Gift* ſaving *Faith is* [h], their Efforts would be vain. But let any one jointly ſtrive and pray for a deep Conviction, that the Bible is the appointed Inſtrument of his religious Proficiency: then let him read it, not as performing a Taſk, he knows not why, from which he had rather be excuſed; not to outſhine others in Readineſs of Quotation, or Plauſibility of Interpreting, or *Oppoſitions of Science falſely ſo called* [i]; not to furniſh himſelf with Weapons for Debate and Controverſy, much leſs for Uncharitableneſs and Abuſe; but to amend his inward State towards God: that, as the excellent Collect in our Liturgy directs, *by* the *Patience* in well doing and *Comfort* in virtuous Suffering, which we learn *of his holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold faſt the bleſſed Hope of everlaſting Life* [k]. Let him accordingly ſtop on fit Occaſions, and think: What Conſolations doth this Paſſage adminiſter to me? What Acknowledgements to Heaven doth this Declaration require from me? What Fear for myſelf doth this Threatening call for?

[h] Eph. ii. 8. [i] 1 Tim. vi. 20. [k] Second Sunday in Advent.

What

What Duty doth this Precept or Pattern point out to me? of what Sin doth it convince me? againſt what Dangers doth it warn me? Is my Character and Behaviour ſuitable to this Command or Exhortation, this Deſcription or good Example? or do I ſee myſelf here, under another Name, reproved, condemned, ſtigmatized? Have I acquired that Senſe of my own Sinfulneſs and Weakneſs, of God's Holineſs and Juſtice, of my Need of the Merits of Chriſt and the Grace of the Divine Spirit, which the whole Tenour of Scripture inculcates: or am I ſtill inclined to ſtand or fall by my own Righteouſneſs? Faithful Pains taken for ſome Time in ſuch home Queſtions, without forcing unnatural Uſes out of any Text, but only dwelling on thoſe that fairly preſent themſelves, will make us experience a divine Virtue in the ſacred Writings, piercing firſt and healing afterwards; which, provided we are not ſatisfied with being piouſly moved at the Time, and then relapſing into what we were before, but continue the Inquiry ſteadily, and carry on every Feeling into Practice, will aſſuredly tranſform us into what we ought to be. Poſſibly indeed we may not all receive a very ſenſible Benefit very ſoon. Alterative Medicines often

produce their Effect but ſlowly: and the moſt perfect Regimen of Diet ſweetens and nouriſhes by unperceived Degrees. We have ſurely no Title to be impatient under the Hands of our heavenly Phyſician: perfect Recovery will at Length be the certain Conſequence of his Treatment of us: and every ſingle Ingredient in the great Remedy, his holy Word, and every Direction for the Uſe of it, will contribute its Share to our Cure. Let us therefore conſcientiouſly obſerve all his Orders, each in their due Place; and as the only one, for which there is Room left at preſent, let us intreat his Bleſſing on our humble Endeavours, that receiving the Seed of *the Word into a good and honeſt Heart*, we may *bring forth Fruit with Patience*[l]: uſing for that Purpoſe the Petitions of his Servant *David*. *Teach me, O Lord, the Way of thy Statutes, and I ſhall keep it unto the End. Give me Underſtanding, and I ſhall keep thy Law: yea, I ſhall keep it with my whole Heart. Make me to go in the Path of thy Commandments: for therein is my Deſire*[m].

[l] Luke viii. 15. [m] Pſ. cxix. 33, 34, 35.

SER-

SERMON VI.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

— I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo.

THESE Words, in their firſt and ſtricteſt Senſe, relate to thoſe Gifts of Inſpiration, which the primitive Church enjoyed: the holy Ghoſt then frequently enabling many Members of it, beſides the Apoſtles, to *ſpeak in Tongues*, which they had never learned, *the wonderful Works of God*[a]; and dictating to them Petitions and Praiſes fitted to their Circumſtances. But, as the ordinary Gifts of Heaven to Mankind are left to be managed according to the Diſcretion of thoſe, who enjoy

[a] Acts ii. 11.

them:

them: ſo the divine Wiſdom preſerved an Uniformity of Conduct, and kept to the ſame Rule, in Reſpect of theſe extraordinary ones. *The Spirits of the Prophets*,, as the Apoſtle tells us, ver. 32. *were ſubject to the Prophets.* It was in their Choice, when they would uſe the Power of ſpeaking with divers Tongues: and on what Occaſions they would produce the Prayers and Hymns, with which they were inſpired. In this, (and no Wonder,) they did not all of them judge always prudently: their thankful Zeal to publiſh theſe miraculous Favours, and perhaps a too great, but very natural, Self-Complacency in being poſſeſſed of ſuch remarkable Privileges, prompting ſome of them ſometimes to give Demonſtrations of it in their Aſſemblies, when few or none were preſent, who underſtood the Language they ſpoke: in which Caſe the Exerciſe of their Endowments was only a Hindrance to the ſtated, and though leſs admired, yet more uſeful Devotions and Inſtructions of the Congregation in their native Dialect. And therefore St. *Paul*, in the true Spirit of Chriſtianity, reproves this Oſtentation: reminds them, that the Gift of Tongues was deſigned to convince Unbelievers by a ſeaſonable Uſe of it, not to provoke their Scorn, or bring

Diſ-

Diſorder into the Church, by an unſeaſonable one; that the other Gift of PROPHESYING, teaching Men their Chriſtian Duty, and exhorting them to the Practice of it, (for this the Word means here, and this the *Jewiſh* Prophets made their chief Buſineſs,) was a much more valuable Thing, than that of ſpeaking to Them, or to God, in Languages known to few of them; which therefore they ſhould do modeſtly and ſparingly; never indeed, but when the Speaker, or ſome one preſent, was able to interpret what he ſaid ſo readily and properly, as might edify the Hearers; for their conſtant Endeavour ſhould be to exert all the Powers of this Kind, which the Holy Ghoſt had beſtowed on them, rationally and diſcreetly, ſo as to inform and improve others. *I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo:* that is, Every Perſon endowed with ſupernatural Abilities, of this or any other Sort, was to think himſelf bound to employ them in ſo diſcreet a Manner, that all around him might be inſtructed and benefited, as much as poſſible.

This, you will find, on carefully reading it, is the Meaning of the Text, and of the Chapter

ter in which it occurs. And the whole ſhews, both the Truth of extraordinary and miraculous Gifts at that Time; (for had they not been real, no Directions about them could have been wanted, or would have been given;) and alſo the admirable Wiſdom and genuine Goodneſs of the Apoſtle, in which we may well preſume the reſt to have been like him. He permitted not theſe Accompliſhments, wonderful and ſhining as they were, to interfere with the plain Rules of Order and Edification; or to be at all ſet on a Level with the humble Virtue of Chriſtian Charity, doing Good to Men from Love of God. Now ſuch Things as theſe are great Confirmations of our holy Religion, and do it great Honour.

But though the firſt and immediate Meaning of the Text be what I have now explained; a more general Inſtruction, and applicable to every Age of the Church, may be juſtly drawn from it. The ſame divine Comforter, who inſpired the Devotions of Believers then, influences their Hearts in the Performance of them now: the ſame Duty of uſing due Precautions to make the Service of the Church intelligible, which the Apoſtle preſſed ſo ſtrongly in his own Time, equally ſubſiſts in ours: And therefore the Words which I have read to you, compre-

hend

hend two Points of Doctrine, as needful at preſent as ever they were.

I. That good Chriſtians are aſſiſted by the holy Ghoſt in offering up their Petitions and Praiſes. *I will pray with the Spirit: I will ſing with the Spirit.*

II. That we ſhould be very ſolicitous rightly to apprehend the Senſe and Fitneſs of what we ſay and do in God's Worſhip. *I will pray, I will ſing, with the Underſtanding alſo.*

I. That good Chriſtians are aſſiſted by the holy Ghoſt in offering up their Petitions and Praiſes to their heavenly Father. The *Spirit of God* hath *ſtriven* with bad Perſons [b], and therefore doubtleſs effectually operated on pious ones, from the Beginning of the World. The Pſalmiſt, on his falling into Sin, prays that God would *not take his holy Spirit from him* [c]. And more eſpecially God promiſes, in the Prophet *Zechariah*, that he will *pour* on his People *the Spirit of Grace and of Supplication* [d]. In the New Teſtament we are told, that *if any Man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his* [e]; that *the Spirit helpeth our Infirmities* in Prayer, *making Interceſſion for us* [f]; that we are to

[b] Gen. vi. 3. [c] Pſ. li. 11. [d] Zech. xii. 10.
[e] Rom. viii. 9. [f] Ver. 26.

pray always with all Prayer and Supplication in the Spirit [g], and *praying in the holy Ghoſt to keep ourſelves in the Love of God* [h].

But though it be undeniable, that the holy Spirit, who indeed excites us to, and fits us for, every Duty, doth not withhold his Influences in this: yet how far they extend, is Matter of Diſpute; and particularly between thoſe who approve, and thoſe who diſapprove, Liturgies or Forms of Prayer. And which are in the Right, it ſhall be the principal Buſineſs of this Diſcourſe to ſhew: not with Intention to raiſe in you either Hatred or Contempt of any, who diſſent from our Church on that Head, (God forbid!) but only to make you more ſenſible of the Propriety and Advantages of the Way you are in; and incline you to that proportionable Improvement by it, which God will expect.

Some then apprehend, that there is ſuch a Gift or Spirit of Prayer, beſtowed by the holy Ghoſt on true Chriſtians, and peculiarly on all that are worthy to be Miniſters of God's Word, as enables them to addreſs themſelves to Heaven, on all Occaſions, copiouſly and ſuitably, in unpremeditated Words of their own: which they

[g] Eph. vi. 18. [h] Jude, 20, 21.

think

think ought not to be reſtrained by appointing Forms, even for the public Uſe of Congregations. And ſometimes the Text is quoted in Support of this Opinion. But plainly, ſo far as it relates to Words, it relates to Words inſpired; to which, in the ſtrict Senſe, but few of theſe Perſons themſelves lay any Claim: for indeed it would be equalling their own Compoſitions to the holy Scripture. And excepting this miraculous Gift of inſpired Prayer, the Word of God mentions no Gift of ready Expreſſion in Prayer: nor have we the leaſt Ground to conſider it as coming from above, any otherwiſe than as *every good Gift*, every natural Ability, which God hath conferred upon us, and every Improvement, which he qualifies us to make by our own Induſtry, *is from above*[1]. For evidently this Talent is one of that Sort: depending, partly on the Fluency of Speech, to which People are born, partly on the Art and Diligence, which they uſe to increaſe it; and varying, as their Health and Spirits vary. Nor therefore is there any more Harm in reſtraining this Faculty, if good Reaſons require it, than in reſtraining any other. Even the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit, you have ſeen, were

[1] James i. 17.

frequently put under ſome Reſtraints: much more then may one of our ordinary Powers. And they who call it limiting and ſtinting the Spirit, have no Scripture Warrant, either for the Phraſe, or the Thing which they underſtand by it. Nay, ſuppoſing the holy Ghoſt did ever ſo peculiarly aſſiſt in directing the Words of Prayer, why ſhould we not think him as likely to have aſſiſted in the drawing up of the eſtabliſhed Forms, as in the extempore Performances of thoſe who reject Forms, and truſt to the ſudden Dictates of their own Fancy?

The *Spirit of Prayer* and *praying in* or *by the Spirit*, are indeed Scripture Terms: but, ſo far as they belong to the preſent Age, they ſignify, not being furniſhed with Variety of Phraſes in Prayer, but a much more valuable Bleſſing, having religious Affections breathed into us by the holy Ghoſt for the Exerciſe of this Duty. And *quenching the Spirit* [k], in the only Senſe, which can be applied to Us, means extinguiſhing ſuch Affections, by indulging Sin, or ſuffering them to die away through Negligence. God is no more delighted with Change of Expreſſions, than with a Repetition of the ſame:

[k] 1 Theſſ. v. 19.

nor

nor will ever be weary of a devout Soul, for Want of new Language. Common Reaſon pronounces this: and the Bible confirms it. We find ſeveral Forms of Prayer, preſcribed on ſeveral Occaſions in the Law of *Moſes* [l]. We find afterwards a whole Book of Forms, the Pſalms of *David*. We find our Saviour frequenting the *Jewiſh* Synagogue, which conſtantly uſed a Form, and a very mean one. We find him enjoining his Diſciples a Form of his own compoſing for them: *When ye pray, ſay, Our Father* [m], and ſo on. Nay, at the very Time, when the Gift of inſpired Prayer was common, there is a ſtrong Appearance in the fourth Chapter of the *Acts*, that the Apoſtles and their Followers uſed a Form, there ſet down. For how elſe could *they lift up their Voice, and ſay it with one Accord*, as ver. 24. aſſures us they did? Probably the very next Age after them practiſed this Method of public Worſhip, at leaſt in a good Meaſure: and for more than 1400 Years paſt it hath been without Queſtion almoſt univerſally the only one. There is not at this Day a Chriſtian Church in the World, but what uſes in Part of their Ser-

[l] Numb. vi. 22, 23, &c. x. 35, 36. Deut. xxi. 7, 8. xxvi. 13. [m] Luke xi. 2.

vice, if not throughout it, Forms of human Compoſition; excepting that of *Scotland*, which had one immediately upon the Reformation, though it afterwards fell into Diſuſe; and the Diſſenters from our own, who, notwithſtanding, many of them ſing in their Aſſemblies Hymns that are Forms of human Compoſition, without Scruple. Yet if extempore Prayers be required, extempore Praiſes are too. For it is equally ſaid, *I will pray with the Spirit*, and, *I will ſing with the Spirit*.

It may be replied indeed, that ſuppoſing Forms of Prayer lawful, they are not however expedient. But if that be all, ſo long as the vaſtly greater, and the ruling Part think otherwiſe, ought not the reſt to acquieſce? Is it not much leſs expedient to make a Separation and Diviſion in the Church, when Chriſt and his Apoſtles have ſo ſtrongly preſcribed Unity and Submiſſion?

But why are Forms of Prayer inexpedient? It is argued, that they cannot be altered according to Circumſtances, which extempore Prayers may. And, with Reſpect to private Devotion, the Argument is ſo far of Weight, that though even in this, Forms well choſen are excellent Directions, yet no one ſhould confine himſelf cloſely

cloſely to them, when his Condition, ſpiritual or temporal, requires him to depart from them: but ſhould omit, or add, or vary, as he perceives Occaſion; in which he may well hope, that God's holy Spirit will guide him, ſo far as is needful. But the Circumſtances of whole Congregations, taken together, are in the Main almoſt always the ſame: and therefore may be expreſſed in the ſame Words. Beſides, public Offices make a ſtated Proviſion for the more uſual Accidents that happen: and public Authority provides for the reſt occaſionally, from Time to Time. Indeed an eſtabliſhed Liturgy doth not allow the Caſes of private Perſons or Families, or the Situation, real or ſuppoſed, of national Affairs, to be enlarged on to God, at the Diſcretion of the Miniſter: a Thing never neceſſary, and ſeldom proper. It is very ſufficient, that they who deſire the reſt of the Aſſembly to join with them in Petitions or Thankſgivings on fit Subjects, relating to themſelves, have Opportunity afforded them of ſignifying their Deſire: and that general Expreſſions in the Service may be applied more eſpecially to particular Purpoſes by each Member in his own Mind, as he conceives there is Need. If theſe Things be carefully done, Forms of Prayer will

be found not ſo often defective perhaps in the Matter of uncommon and extraordinary Wants or Mercies, as extempore Prayers in what is far more neceſſary, expreſſing common and ordinary ones.

But ſome inſiſt, that whatever may be ſaid, they experience, that Forms do not edify, and excite Devotion. And this may be true, while they are unaccuſtomed to them, and come with Prejudice againſt them. But would they make Trial of them for ſome Time, with a ſerious Endeavour of receiving Benefit from them, they would not fail to find that true Spirit of Piety raiſed by them in their own Hearts, of which we hope they would ſee many Inſtances in their Fellow-Worſhippers. It is true, a Form doth not afford the Entertainment of Novelty. But that hath nothing to do with Devotion. The Hearer may be highly delighted, the Speaker highly admired: and all this may be mere Amuſement of the Fancy, and no Prayer in Reality offered up by Him, who is beſt pleaſed with it. What alone deſerves that Name, is a reverent Application to God, from a deep Senſe of our Neceſſities and Bleſſings, and His Power and Goodneſs: which a Form deliberately precompoſed by the joint Counſels

of

of a Number of Perſons, whom the public Wiſdom hath choſen for that End, is ſurely more likely both to excite, and to expreſs fitly, than the haſty Produce of each private Miniſter's Invention: eſpecially as he is expected by his People to vary even this continually, though it be for the worſe.

One Man will doubtleſs excell another in this Way: and ſome perhaps may, really or ſeemingly, ſurpaſs at ſome Times the public Forms. But what Multitudes would there be, who through Inability, Careleſſneſs, Want of Memory, Diffidence, or Imprudence, would fall vaſtly ſhort of them, were every Miniſter in the Nation to uſe, every Time he officiates, a new Prayer of his own deviſing upon the Spot? How often doth it happen, were we to know the Truth, amongſt the ſmall Number of our Diſſenters, that the Perſon praying heſitates and is at a Loſs, omits Things neceſſary or uſeful, expreſſes himſelf obſcurely, improperly, irreverently, works himſelf into Geſtures and Accents by no Means edifying, not to ſay worſe? All which muſt grievouſly hurt the Devotion of thoſe, who deſire to pay God a *reaſonable Service*[n]; and bring Thoughts into their Minds,

[n] Rom. xii. 1.

extremely

extremely unſuitable to the Work in which they are engaged. Then what Danger is there in this Way, that Men may fill their public Addreſſes to Heaven with their own private, it may be abſurd and pernicious, Notions and Opinions: that national Prayers may change, like Faſhions and Fancies, and the Faith of Chriſtians change along with them; which the Weight and Authority of an eſtabliſhed Liturgy greatly contributes to keep ſtedfaſt, and preſerve from noxious Errors? What Danger is there alſo, that Perſons, either by ill Deſign, or ill judging Zeal, may mix their Intereſts, their Paſſions, their Party-Attachments of various Kinds, with the Requeſts and Thankſgivings, which they utter in the Name of the Congregation; may inflame one Part of a Neighbourhood, one Part of their Fellow-Subjects, againſt another; ſtir up ſome to Miſchief, under Colour of its being the Cauſe of God; and by ſo doing, make his Worſhip abhorred by the reſt? I am far from charging the Body of thoſe amongſt us, who uſe extempore Prayer, with being guilty of theſe Things now. I am only repreſenting, what Evils a more general Uſe of it would be likely to produce, eſpecially in Times of public Diſcord. Indeed moſt of them, if not all, it formerly

merly hath produced: and preventing them is much eaſier, and every Way better, than puniſhing them.

But ſuppoſing theſe Inconveniences avoided, another, very conſiderable, would remain. Let their Diſlike of Forms be ever ſo great, the Words of their Miniſter in praying are as abſolutely a Form to Them for the Time, as the Words of a national Liturgy: but with this unhappy Difference, that his Expreſſions being continually varied, poſſibly the moſt judicious, at leaſt the ſlower and more ignorant, may often doubt of their Meaning; and the ſcrupulous, of their **Fitneſs**: and though upon Conſideration they **ſhould** be ſatisfied, yet He in the mean while is gone on to ſomething elſe. And thus they may follow after him through the whole of a Prayer, and be able to overtake and really join with him in but a ſmall Part of it: whereas a Form may always be examined beforehand; and when it is once underſtood and found to be right, our Judgement and Affections will go together in the Uſe of it, without Let or Hindrance; and we ſhall be edified, not in Imagination, but Reality.

Upon the whole, the Reaſons for a public Liturgy are ſo ſtrong, that *Calvin*, the moſt univerſally

univerſally eſteemed by our diſſenting Brethren of all the Reformers, in a Letter to the Protector of *England*, under *Edw.* VI. hath theſe Words. "*As to a Form of Prayer and of Eccleſiaſtical Rites, I highly approve that it ſhould be certain, from which it may not be lawful for any Miniſter to depart: as well in Conſideration of the Weakneſs and Ignorance of ſome, as that it may more plainly appear, how our Churches agree amongſt themſelves; and laſtly, that a Stop may be put to the Giddineſs of thoſe, who affect Novelties.*

Still I am ſenſible, that ſome of the Arguments, which I have urged againſt Devotions compoſed by the Miniſter, may ſeem to lie equally againſt Sermons compoſed by him; and to require, that Inſtruction be in a conſtant Form, as well as Prayer. But, beſides that one hath been the *Cuſtom of the Churches of God*[o], the other not; Prayer is the Voice of the People to their Heavenly Father; and ſhould therefore be preſerved, with ſingular Caution, from every Thing, which they ought not to ſay, or may not immediately comprehend or approve; elſe, in ſuch Parts of the Service, either they do not pray at all, or they pray

[o] 1 Cor. xi. 16.

amiſs.

amiſs. But preaching is the Voice of the Miniſter to the People, which they may weigh and judge of at their Leiſure: and even ſhould they fail of learning their Duty from thence, they may learn it from a much higher Authority, the Leſſons of Scripture read to them. Further, where a fixed Form of Worſhip is appointed, Inſtruction may be left at Liberty more ſafely; becauſe it will be obſerved, if the latter contradicts the former: and alſo very uſefully, becauſe a much greater Variety of Things is requiſite to be ſaid to the People in Sermons, than is needful for them to ſay to Heaven in their Prayers. But how proper ſoever it may be to have ſome Form, they, who diſſent from us, apprehend there are ſuch great Imperfections and Faults in the eſtabliſhed Form, that if they muſt *pray with the Spirit and with the Underſtanding*, they muſt not pray by that. Now Imperfections will be found in every Thing human: and if theſe be a ſufficient Objection againſt our Prayers, it will hold againſt their own and all Prayers, excepting that of our bleſſed Lord. From every Thing unlawful we are ready to prove that our Service Book is intirely free. But the Faults of extempore Devotions, which are different in every

Congre-

Congregation, and every Time of meeting in the ſame Congregation, eaſily eſcape the Notice of ſuch as are prejudiced in their Favour, who alone hear them; and when obſerved, it is only by a few, and they are ſoon forgotten: while thoſe that are charged on a public printed Liturgy, lie open conſtantly, Year after Year, to the Cenſure of every one. And were it poſſible, that the ſeveral Prayers offered up, in any one Day, in the ſeveral diſſenting Aſſemblies of this Kingdom, could be written down; and examined half ſo narrowly for a ſhort Space, as Ours have been for two Centuries together: can it be imagined, that many times more and worſe Omiſſions and Improprieties would not be found, in almoſt every one of them, than They have pretended to find in our Common-Prayer? Still we are far from ſaying, it is incapable of any Alteration for the better. Yet this we muſt ſay, that moſt of the Alterations, propoſed by ſome Perſons, have been thought by others, every Way their Equals, if not Superiors, by no means to be Amendments. And as eminent a Nonconformiſt, as ever was, Mr. *Baxter*, hath long ſince owned, that almoſt every Church on Earth hath a worſe Liturgy, than Ours.

There

There hath indeed been *a railing Accuſation* [p], even of Popery, brought againſt it: though it was firſt compiled, then reviewed and approved, by Confeſſors and Martyrs for the Proteſtant Cauſe; and ſeveral Articles of Popery are as flatly contradicted in it, as can be. Some Parts of it, we acknowledge, were in the *Romiſh* Offices before: but not one Tenth of the whole, as a very diligent Perſon hath computed [q]. Moſt of this tenth Part alſo was in much ancienter Offices, before the *Romiſh* Corruptions were introduced. And had it not; as even theſe Prayers are intirely free from thoſe Corruptions, where can be the Harm of uſing them? Had our Reformers rejected them, they would have been in Reality never the farther diſtant from the Papiſts. And by retaining them, they had a Proſpect of bringing many of the Papiſts over to themſelves: by ſhewing, that they did not act from Paſſion and Prejudice, but Reaſon and Conſideration; that they reſpected the ancient Offices and Uſages of the purer Ages of the Church, and departed only from modern Abuſes and Errors.

It hath alſo been alledged, that we wear the Habits of the Papiſts in offering up theſe Pray-

[p] Jude ver. 9. [q] Dr. *Bennet* on the Common Prayer, App. 1.

ers.

ers. But indeed, though it were no Way material if we did, ours are very different from theirs. And if wearing any, which are not in common Uſe, be condemned, what Cauſe is there for it? why may not ſacred, as well as civil Offices of Dignity and Importance, be made ſomewhat more ſolemn by Veſtments appropriated to them? The Fitneſs of it hath been confeſſed by the conſtant Practice of Mankind, and particularly of the Chriſtian Church in early Ages, and indeed of our Diſſenting Miniſters themſelves; who change their Dreſs a little, when they officiate. And where is the Harm, if we change ours a little more? Though after all, if the wearing of ſuch Garments by Us of the Clergy were a Fault, it would be intirely our own Fault: and ſeeing us wear them could ſurely hurt no Body.

But beſides theſe general Objections, there are ſeveral made againſt particular Paſſages, which ought to be confuted. This therefore I purpoſe, God willing, to do in a proper Number of Diſcourſes, on all the ſtated Offices of our Liturgy: and not only to vindicate what is blamed, but explain alſo what too many may poſſibly not underſtand, and direct your Notice

to

to what may not be ſufficiently obſerved. All theſe Things will very well come under the Head, of which I promiſed at firſt to treat

II. That we ſhould be very ſolicitous rightly to apprehend the Senſe and Fitneſs of what we ſay and do in God's Preſence. For though cenſuring without Reaſon is worſe, yet eſteeming without Reaſon is not the Part of wiſe Men. And ſome perhaps are mighty zealous for our Liturgy, who yet know but very imperfectly, what good Reaſon they have to be zealous for it. Indeed amongſt many Advantages of public Forms of Prayer, there ſeems to be one Diſadvantage; that the Words of them being in the main continually the ſame, and thus becoming well known and familiar, we often hear them, and even ſpeak our Share of them, with ſcarce any Attention to them. But then it is equally true, that we often hear Sermons, though they are new to us, with juſt as little Regard; and therefore ſhould be likely very ſoon to hear extempore Prayers alſo with no leſs Negligence: which Fault our Liturgy is in ſeveral Reſpects peculiarly calculated to prevent, as I ſhall hereafter ſhew you. But ſtill the Danger is great enough, to demand our utmoſt Care to guard againſt it. For however good

our public Offices are in themſelves, they convey no Good to Us, farther than we comprehend the Import of them, and mind it: which, the better they are, the more they deſerve from us. And on the other Hand, were they ever ſo mean, this would be no Excuſe for omitting to get all the Benefit we could from them; but a powerful Motive, though a very unhappy one, to endeavour it moſt earneſtly. Yet thinking them defective and blameable where they are not, or to a Degree in which they are not, as Multitudes have done, will naturally diſcompoſe, or deaden at leaſt, our Minds in the Uſe of them: and therefore ſhould be avoided, as far as it can. Now Perſons may indeed by their own private Conſideration enter very competently, both into the Meaning and the Grounds of moſt Things contained in the Liturgy. They, who are able to purchaſe a few Books, may likewiſe receive much additional Information from the ſeveral very uſeful Paraphraſes and Commentaries upon it, that are extant. And they are much to blame, if they wilfully neglect either of theſe Things. But ſtill many cannot, and others are not likely to do them. To ſuch therefore I ſhall attempt to give ſome Inſtruction concerning the Service, in which we

join

join ſo often. The fewer need it, the better: but thoſe who do it, it is of Importance to aſſiſt. For with the more Underſtanding we pray, with the more Pleaſure and Earneſtneſs we ſhall pray. And as on our Praying, as we ought, depends our obtaining God's Grace and Bleſſing; ſo on that depends our only true Comfort in this World, and our eternal Happineſs in the next.

SERMON VII.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

——I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo.

FROM theſe Words I have propoſed to diſcourſe on the two following Subjects.

I. That good Chriſtians are aſſiſted by the holy Ghoſt, in offering up their Petitions and Praiſes to God. *I will pray with the Spirit: I will ſing with the Spirit.*

II. That we ſhould be very ſolicitous rightly to apprehend the Senſe and Fitneſs of what we ſay and do in his Preſence. *I will pray, I will ſing, with the Underſtanding alſo.*

The former of theſe Heads I have finiſhed: and after proving its Truth, I made it my chief

Endeavour to prove further, that this Aid from above is not ſuch, as to afford any Argument againſt uſing public Forms of Prayer; of which I ſhewed you both the Lawfulneſs and the Expediency: anſwering, at the ſame Time, ſome general Objections againſt our own eſtabliſhed Form; but reſerving the more particular ones for the ſecond Head: under which I promiſed to vindicate the principal Things, which have been blamed in the ſtated Offices of our Liturgy; to explain ſuch as may ſeem hard to underſtand, or liable to be miſunderſtood; and direct your Attention to ſuch, as you may not otherwiſe obſerve ſufficiently. To this I ſhall now proceed, following the Order of the Book.

But it will be proper firſt to take Notice of the laudable Cuſtom, that every one, who comes to join in the Devotions of our Church, ſhould perform, at his Entrance into his Place, a ſhort preparatory Act of Worſhip in private. Now this, as well as every Thing elſe, ought to be done *with Underſtanding:* not to be an unmeaning Formality, in ignorant Compliance with common Practice; but a ſerious Addreſs to God, that he would enable and incline us to attend in ſuch Manner to what we are about to hear, and ſay, and do, that we may honour and

pleaſe

pleaſe Him, edify our Fellow-Worſhippers, benefit and finally ſave our own Souls. For which Purpoſe, either theſe very Words, which I have mentioned, may be uſed; or any others of the like Import, choſen by ourſelves; or, as perhaps is more uſual, thoſe expreſſive and excellent ones, that conclude the 19th Pſalm: *Let the Words of my Mouth, and the Meditation of my Heart, be acceptable in thy Sight, O Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer.* Only, whatever our Expreſſions are, we ſhould be extremely careful not to make ſo very bad a Beginning, as to put up this previous Requeſt either thoughtleſsly or inſincerely. And the ſame Care ſhould employ our Minds throughout the whole. For that End, we ſhould avoid, as much as we can, all needleſs, but abſolutely all light and ludicrous Converſation, even before the Service begins. And after it is begun, the fewer of the more tranſient Intercourſes of Civility are exchanged, the better. For ſurely they make a very unſuitable Mixture with the awful Words, which we are hearing, or perhaps repeating, at the ſame Time: and muſt in ſome Degree take off our Attention from them. Nor will it be a leſs Hindrance of our Devotion, to remark over curiouſly, what other Per-

ſons are preſent, what Appearance they make, or how they behave. Let not theſe Directions, I intreat you, either give Offence, or be deſpiſed. Very good People, I fear the very beſt of us all, tranſgreſs them inadvertently, more or leſs. But a Moment's Reflection will ſhew any one, that there is great Propriety in obſerving them: and they will experience more Advantage from it, than perhaps they expect.

Our Service begins, as did that of the primitive Church [a], with a Preface, to diſpoſe more completely the Minds of the Congregation to a reverent Performance of the Duty, on which they are entering: according to that Precept of the Son of *Sirach*, *Before thou prayeſt, prepare thyſelf* [b]. And this Preface is compoſed of Sentences of Scripture, with an Exhortation grounded upon them. Nothing can ſo effectually awaken us to a pious Frame of Soul, as the Words of God, ſpeaking to us. And the Words, here uſed, are very prudently ſelected. They all relate to Repentance and Confeſſion of Sins; which naturally ſtands firſt in the Devotions of guilty Creatures, as we all are. Till we feel a genuine Sorrow for having offended

[a] Sacerdos ante Orationem, Præfatione præmiſſa parat Fratrum mentes. Cypr. de Orat. Dom. [b] Eccluſ xviii. 23.

God,

God, and come to intreat earneſtly the Pardon, which is offered us through Chriſt, he cannot accept us: and when we do, that will qualify us for every other Part of his Worſhip.

In theſe Texts, (you may turn to them in your Prayer-Books, and go through them along with me) we are plainly taught the Nature of true Penitence: that *the Wicked muſt* both *turn away from his Wickedneſs*, and *do that*, which the *Law* enjoins as *right*, *to ſave his Soul alive:* that we muſt not only *acknowledge our Tranſgreſſions* with our Tongues, but have them *ever before* the Eyes of our Minds, to keep us humble and cautious; on which we may pray, in Faith of being heard, that God will treat us with the ſame Kindneſs, as if he *hid his Face from* ſeeing our *Sins*, or *blotted* them *out* from his Memory: that he requires from us, neither the fanciful *Sacrifices* of Superſtition, nor the expenſive ones of the *Moſaic* Diſpenſation; but that of *a Spirit contrite* with filial Sorrow, and *broken* to univerſal Obedience; not outward Expreſſions of vehement Paſſion, as *rending the Garments*, but a *Heart* rent and penetrated with a juſt Senſe of what we have done amiſs: that on ſuch a Change within we ſhall find him, not only *ſlow to Anger* for what is paſt, and

ready

ready to repent him of the Evil which he was bringing upon us, but bountiful and gracious for the Time to come; *though we have* deliberately *rebelled againſt him* heretofore, and ſtill too often inconſiderately neglect to *obey his Voice, and walk in his Laws:* that we have Cauſe to be willing, and even deſirous, that he ſhould *correct* us, when he ſees it expedient; but to beg he would do it *with* that mild and merciful *Judgement*, which he exerciſes towards his Children, *not with Anger*, as his Enemies, which would *bring us* to final Deſtruction: that Repentance is abſolutely and immediately neceſſary for us; for *the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand*; the Hour, when we ſhall, each of us, be admitted into it or excluded out of it for ever, draws very near, and how near we know not: that therefore we muſt reſolve to *ariſe and go to our heavenly Father* without Delay, and acknowledge our Unworthineſs *to be called his Sons:* that whatever we may be in our own Eyes, or the Opinion of our Fellow-Creatures, were we to undergo a human Trial only; yet if God *enter into Judgement with us, in his Sight ſhall no Man living be juſtified:* that therefore to extenuate our Faults, and *ſay* or imagine, *that we have no Sin*, or but little, would

be

be a fatal *Self-Deceit*, and a Proof againſt us, that we know not, or own not, the *Truth* of our Caſe: but if we honeſtly recall to ourſelves and *confeſs* to God the Errors of our paſt Life, not only his Mercy, but his *Faithfulneſs and Juſtice* to his Promiſes will induce him, both to *forgive us* the Guilt of *our Sins*, and *to cleanſe us from* the Defilement, and deliver us from the Dominion, of *all Unrighteouſneſs*.

It is true, but few of theſe Sentences are uſually read at the ſame Time: but it will be very beneficial for ſuch as come ſoon enough, to meditate on them all before the Service begins.

The firſt Words of the Exhortation, *Dearly beloved Brethren*, expreſs very ſtrongly and properly the good Will and tender Regard, which the Miniſters of God's Word ſhould have for their People: who ſhould in Return receive their Admonitions meekly and thankfully, ſince they *ſpeak* to them *the Truth in Love* [c].

A following Part of the Exhortation reminds us, that *although we ought at all Times*, even in our private Supplications, *humbly to acknowledge our Sins before God; yet ought we moſt chiefly ſo to do, when we aſſemble and meet together*,

[c] Eph. iv. 15.

gether. Our Saviour hath laid a peculiar Streſs on joint Prayers; and made more eſpecial Promiſes to thoſe Petitions, which his Diſciples put up in common [d]: both to unite them cloſely in mutual Affection, by the mutual Benefits they receive at each other's Requeſt; and to encourage a Practice, which he foreſaw would prove ſo powerful a Means, both of their own Edification, and the Converſion of others. We have Reaſon therefore to entertain a much higher Eſteem, than many do, of the Advantages to be obtained from Conſtancy in public Worſhip. But then, the more we expect from it, with the more Care we muſt qualify ourſelves for what we expect: elſe we ſhall certainly be diſappointed. And as penitent Confeſſion in the Name of Chriſt is the great Qualification for Pardon and every Mercy; and each one's Example, in the Church, of that or the contrary, muſt have a good or bad Effect on thoſe around him, we ſhould endeavour, if there be Room for any Difference, to be more than ordinarily humble and fervent there: Yet we are in Danger of being leaſt ſo, unleſs we look well to our Ways, and diligently *keep our Foot, when we go to the Houſe of God* [e].

[d] Matt. xviii. 20. [e] Eccles v. 1.

In

In the next Words, after theſe, the ſeveral main Branches of Worſhip, following Confeſſion, are expreſſed. And nearly the ſame Order is obſerved in the Service, as in the Exhortation. *We render Thanks* to God *and ſet forth his Praiſe*, in the Pſalms and Hymns; *hear his moſt holy Word*, in the Leſſons; *and aſk thoſe Things, which are requiſite and neceſſary*, in the Prayers.

The Concluſion of this Preface, *Wherefore I pray and beſeech you, to accompany me with a pure Heart*, that is, a ſincere one, *to the Throne of the heavenly Grace*, agrees intirely in Senſe, and partly in Words, with that pathetic Declaration of St. *Paul: As though God did beſeech you by Us, we pray you in Chriſt's ſtead, Be ye reconciled to God* [f].

The *Confeſſion* is directed *to be ſaid of the whole Congregation, after the Miniſter*. If this be done by each Perſon, as is alſo directed, *with an humble Voice*, he will give no Diſturbance to others: and every one muſt experience, that what he ſaith, on this Occaſion, with his own Mouth, is brought more home to his Soul, becomes more perſonal and affecting, than if he had ſilently aſſented to it, when ſaid for him.

[f] 2 Cor. v. 20.

And

And as it is a very useful, so it is a very old Custom[g]; revived in our Church, after being laid aside by the Church of *Rome*; who begin their Service with an Act of Humiliation by the Priest alone, in which the People have no Share.

Another Direction is, that the Confession be said, *all kneeling*. And that Posture in Prayer, especially in this Part, hath not only ancient Authority, but Nature itself, on its Side: and doth so strongly, both express and excite inward Humility, that it should never be omitted wilfully, or negligently, in Favour of Ease and Indolence: Considerations, very unworthy of Notice at such a Time. Still they, whose Infirmities will not permit them to be on their Knees without Pain or Hurt, may doubtless allowably stand, or even sit: for God *will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*[h]. And further: As in many full Congregations this Rule cannot be observed by every one, without taking up more Room, than can with Convenience be spared; certainly the superior Rule, of doing *the Things, wherewith one may edify another*[i], binds us rather to be content with standing, though a less eligible Posture, than exclude Numbers of

[g] Basil, Ep. lxiii. [h] Matt. ix. 13. xii. 7. [i] Rom. xiv. 9.

our

our Fellow-Chriſtians from being tolerably accommodated for joining in Worſhip with us. For kneeling, though greatly preferable, is not preſcribed as indiſpenſably neceſſary. *The Children of Iſrael*, we read in the Book of *Nehemiah* [k], *were aſſembled with Faſting*; and, probably for the Reaſon juſt mentioned, *ſtood and confeſſed their Sins*. The penitent Publican did not fail of being accepted, though he *ſtood*, when he ſaid, *God be merciful to me a Sinner* [l]. And on ſome Days the early Chriſtians did not kneel at all.

In the firſt Words of the Confeſſion, we apply to God, as our *Father*: the Author of our Being, and therefore intitled to all Honour and Service from us; the Adopter of us, after our Forfeiture, into his Family again through Jeſus Chriſt, and therefore intitled to have it paid him with double Gratitude. We acknowledge him *Almighty*, either to protect or puniſh; and therefore to be obeyed from Intereſt, as well as Duty: we acknowledge him to be *moſt merciful*; and therefore, in the higheſt Degree, unfit to have been offended, and fit to have Pardon aſked of him.

[k] Neh. ix. 1, 2. [l] Luke xviii. 13.

The

The Expreſſion, *We have erred and ſtrayed from thy Ways, like loſt Sheep*, is taken from Scripture. *I have gone aſtray, like a loſt Sheep: ſeek thy Servant* [m]. Again: *All we, like Sheep, have gone aſtray; we have turned every one to his own Way: and the Lord hath laid on Him*, on Chriſt, *the Iniquity of us all* [n]. But to underſtand the full Propriety of the Phraſe, it muſt be obſerved, that both the Likelihood of ſtraying was much greater, and the Conſequences of it much more fatal, in open Countries, full of wild Beaſts, as thoſe of the Eaſt were, than in ours. And ſuch a *great and terrible Wilderneſs* [o], in the ſpiritual Senſe, is this World.

It hath been objected, that our Confeſſion is too general. But it comprehends all Sins, both of Omiſſion and Commiſſion. The Particulars, each Perſon's Conſcience, if it be duly tender, will repreſent to itſelf, as far as is needful, or well can be, in public. And was every Sin, that Men can fall into, expreſſed by Name, the Catalogue would be too long; and ſuch, that many, (it is to be hoped) could not with Truth join in the whole: nor would it be proper, that they who had, and had not, been guilty, ſhould

[m] Pſ. cxix. 176. [n] Iſ. liii. 6. [o] Deut. i. 19.

confeſs

confeſs all the ſame Things; or that thoſe about us ſhould perceive, which we did confeſs.

It hath been further objected, that in our appointed Form, there is no Acknowledgement of the original Corruption of our Nature by the Fall. Nor is there an explicit one, even in the Prayer of our bleſſed Lord. But ſurely when we ſay, that *we have followed too much the Devices and Deſires of our own Hearts*, it may well be Part of our Meaning, that they are from the firſt irregular and depraved.

The Words, *and there is no Health in us*, beſides that they alſo profeſs our inward Frame throughout to be more or leſs diſordered, ſignify too, that we have no Power of our own, either to cure the ſpiritual Diſeaſes, of which we are already ſick, or to prevent the Attacks of future ones. And therefore we apply to God, that he would *heal our Souls*[p]: whom alſo, in the Concluſion, we implicitely promiſe, that whatever Amendment ſhall be produced in us by the Means which he preſcribes, we will give the Glory of it, not to ourſelves, but to his holy Name: *who hath bleſſed us with all ſpiritual Bleſſings in Chriſt, to the Praiſe of the Glory of his Grace*[q].

[p] Pſ. xli. 4. [q] Eph. i. 3, 6.

After the Confeſſion follows the Abſolution: which ſome have apprehended to be a very Popiſh Form. But indeed neither of them is taken out of any Popiſh Service. On the contrary, both of them appeared for the firſt Time in the ſecond Edition of King *Edward* the Sixth's Common Prayer-book: which was made with the Advice of foreign, and even Preſbyterian Proteſtants. Nay, this Abſolution was directly levelled againſt Popery. For the Popiſh Abſolutions were given in private, ſeparately to each particular Perſon, poſitively and without Reverſion, in the Name of the Prieſt: and this is given in public, to all Perſons at once, conditionally, if they are truly penitent, in the Name of God. The People were miſled by the former Abſolutions to a groundleſs Truſt in ſacerdotal Power: and would have taken Offence, if after their Confeſſion none had been ſubjoined. This therefore was drawn up, to be uſed over them: which tends very powerfully to comfort Men, but can never miſlead them; becauſe it leads them to truſt only in God's Mercy; and in that no otherwiſe, than if they *truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Goſpel,* proving their Sincerity by their Reformation: on which Terms alone he hath *given his Miniſters Power and*

Commandment to pronounce to his People the Abſolution and Remiſſion of their Sins.

And as none, but his Miniſters, are commiſſioned to make this ſolemn Proclamation of Pardon on his Behalf: it is fitly ordered, that none ſhould ſhare with them in publiſhing it, by repeating it along with them. And you will obſerve, that wherever in the Service the Congregation are not directed to ſpeak, but the Miniſter only, their ſpeaking the ſame Words low, as many Perſons inconſiderately do, removes only Part of the Impropriety, and leaves the reſt. On this therefore, and the like Occaſions, you will remember, that your Buſineſs is only to hearken and aſſent with ſilent Reverence: of which Reverence, in the preſent Caſe, continuing on your Knees, in Token of your humble Thankfulneſs to God, is undoubtedly a ſuitable Expreſſion.

After the abovementioned Declaration, immediately follows an Admonition to *pray for Repentance and God's holy Spirit:* which may ſeem perhaps needleſs and unaccountable; conſidering, that we have juſt been profeſſing to exerciſe Repentance, and have been aſſured of God's Forgiveneſs upon it, of which the Gift of his Spirit is a Conſequence. But if it be

conſidered alſo, that we are to repent, not only before, but after Pardon; and even the more deeply for the Mercy and Love ſhewn in our Pardon, elſe it would be juſtly revoked; and that the Continuance of God's Spirit with us depends on the Continuance of our Supplications for his Preſence, which will alſo procure us greater Degrees of it; there will be found no Weight in this Objection.

At the End of the Abſolution, and of every Prayer, the People are directed to ſay, *Amen*: which means, It is true; we do ſincerely deſire, or ſincerely affirm, what hath been ſaid. This was the Practice of the *Jewiſh* Church: it was alſo that of the Chriſtian in the Apoſtles Days. *How ſhall he, that occupieth the Room of the unlearned, ſay Amen, at thy giving of Thanks, ſeeing he underſtandeth not, what thou ſayeſt*[r]? And the ſubſequent eccleſiaſtical Writers ſhew, that it uſed to be pronounced audibly and fervently: each expreſſing his own Faith or Deſire, and animating that of his Fellow-worſhippers. We ſhould therefore by no Means neglect to give this Proof, amongſt others, that we not only hear the Service with Attention, but join in it with Earneſtneſs.

[r] 1 Cor. xiv. 16.

After

After the Confeſſion and Abſolution, comes the Lord's Prayer: it being a very proper Time to addreſs God in that Form, which our Saviour taught his Diſciples, when we have approved ourſelves his real Diſciples, by Repentance of Sins, and Faith in the Goſpel-offers of Mercy. And as he directs, *When ye pray, ſay, Our Father, &c.* our Liturgy accordingly directs, that every one ſhould ſay it. For ſo they did in the primitive Church: in which it was called, the daily, the appointed, the public, the common Prayer of Chriſtians. Further: as our bleſſed Redeemer delivered it twice, and we ſee it in St. *Matthew* with the Doxology, *For thine is the Kingdom*, &c. and in St. *Luke*, without it; we ſometimes uſe it one Way, ſometimes the other.

And now having preſumed, in theſe ſolemn Words, to claim God for our Father through Chriſt; for though his Name is not mentioned in this Prayer, it is to be underſtood by us in every Article of it; we now proceed to vent the Joy and Thankfulneſs, belonging to ſuch a Privilege: which, I obſerved to you before, is the ſecond Part of our public Service, as it was in the ancient Church; where, St. *Baſil* informs

us [s], the People, after Confeſſion, roſe from Prayer, and went on to Pſalmody. But to make the Tranſition more natural and beneficial, we firſt beg, that God would permit and aſſiſt us, unworthy as we are, to pay him this Homage. *O Lord, open thou our Lips: and our Mouth ſhall ſhew forth thy Praiſe:* which are the Words of *David*, in his chief penitential Pſalm, the Fifty-firſt. Guilt had ſhut up his Mouth from the Utterance of chearful Sounds, till Humiliation and Aſſurance of Pardon gave him that Liberty of Speech again, which, in His Expreſſions, we pray it may give Us. And ſome of the earlieſt Liturgies uſed the ſame Verſe for the ſame Purpoſe: as they did likewiſe that, which follows here, and which is found in two different Pſalms [t], *O God, make Speed to ſave us: O Lord make Haſte to help us:* it being ſeaſonable at all Times to requeſt, that as our Danger is continual, he would be continually at Hand, to *ſave* us from Sin, and *help us* in our Duty; eſpecially when we are juſt advancing to ſo ſublime a Duty, and one which requires ſuch Purity of Heart. *For Praiſe is not ſeemly in the*

[s] Ep. lxiii. [t] Pſ. xl. 13. lxx. 1.

Mouth

Mouth of a Sinner [u], but *it becometh well the Juſt to be thankful* [w].

The Way then being thus prepared, and having qualified ourſelves with holy *David* to ſay, *My Heart is ready, my Heart is ready, I will ſing and give Praiſe* [x], we riſe up from our Knees, and ſtand upon our Feet. For ſo we read, that when *the Prieſts and Levites praiſed the Lord, all Iſrael ſtood* [y]. And we begin this good Work with that Summary of all our Praiſes, to which we ſhall often return in the Courſe of them, and in which we ſhall conclude them: *Glory be* aſcribed *to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghoſt: as it was in the Beginning* of Time by Angels, *when the Morning Stars ſang together, and all the Sons of God ſhouted for Joy* [z]; as it hath been ever ſince, by religious Perſons in ſucceeding Ages, according to the Degree of their Light; as it *is now*, by all the Saints in Earth and Heaven, *and ever ſhall be*, not only throughout the preſent Scene of Things, by new Chriſtians riſing up in the Place of thoſe who die or fall away, (whatever Men or Devils may do to prevent it) but after the final Conſummation, when all are

[u] Ecclus xv. 9. [w] Pſ. xxxiii. 1. [x] Pſ. cviii. 1.
[y] 2 Chron. vii. 6. [z] Job xxxviii. 7.

united into one general Aſſembly: whoſe triumphant Acclamations to our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, ſhall reſound *World without End*, Duration without Period, in that bleſſed State, which ſhall laſt to Eternity.

And now having propoſed the unſpeakably great Subject, that we are to celebrate, we invite each other to enter upon it more particularly: the Miniſter ſaying, *Praiſe ye the Lord*; which is the literal Tranſlation of *Alleluiah*, ſo often repeated in the Old Teſtament, in the New, in the Liturgies of the Univerſal Church; and the People anſwering, with joyful Approbation, *The Lord's Name be praiſed.*

Some indeed of our Diſſenting Brethren have thought, and ſo have ſome Papiſts[a], that dividing this, and other Parts of the Service, as we do, between the Prieſt and the Congregation; and allowing the latter to make Reſponſes; (which means Anſwers) is permitting, not only Laymen, but even Women, againſt an expreſs Prohibition of Scripture, to encroach on the miniſterial Office, makes a diſagreeable confuſed Noiſe, and hinders many from underſtanding what is ſaid. But ſurely the Office of the Miniſter is ſufficiently diſtinguiſhed, as he preſides

[a] See *Bingham*, l. xiv. c. i. §. 13.

and leads, throughout the Service. And why ſhould not the People be ſuffered to follow him; and bear ſome Part with their Voices in praying, as well as the main Part in ſinging? Not to ſay, that the principal Article, in which they do bear a Part, is the *Pſalms* for the Day, which were deſigned to be ſung, where it could be done conveniently, as I wiſh it could every where. No Scripture forbids the Congregation to bear a Part: that which forbids Women to ſpeak in the Church [b], means only to forbid their giving Inſtruction, or entering into Queſtions or Diſputations there. And St. *Paul* commands us to *ſpeak to one another in Pſalms and Hymns and ſpiritual Songs* [c]. Accordingly the primitive Chriſtians are known to have uſed this alternate Manner in their public Prayers and Praiſes. And though, when the Pſalms and Hymns are ſpoken thus, and not ſung, there is nothing harmonious in the Sound, yet St. *John* deſcribes the Worſhip of the Bleſſed above by the *Voice of many Waters and of a great Thunder* [d]; which is no unfit Compariſon for the united Anſwers of a large Congregation. As to the other Part of the Objection, this Method in Reality creates no Confuſion or Dif-

[b] 1 Cor. xiv. 35. [c] Eph. v. 19. [d] Rev. xiv. 2.

ficulty

ficulty at all. A very little Practice will render it eaſy to any one that can read: even they who cannot read, may join in it, by attending to thoſe near them, or to the Clerk: it makes a grateful Variety, keeps Attention awake, and enlivens Devotion. In this Manner then we glorify God: beginning always with the 95th Pſalm, as the whole Chriſtian Church did in early Ages, and as the Nature of the Pſalm recommends to us: it being a diſtinct Invitation to the ſeveral Duties of Praiſe, Prayer and Hearing, with an awful Warning of the Danger of neglecting God, drawn from his Judgements on the diſobedient *Jews*, unto whom *theſe Things happened for Enſamples, and they are written for our Admonition* [e].

When we call him, in this Pſalm, *the Strength of our Salvation*; we mean, that by his Power alone we can be ſaved from preſent and future Evils. When we call him *a great King above all Gods*; we mean, above all that have ever had that Name aſcribed to them: the Princes of the Nations, the falſe Deities of the Heathen, Satan *the God of this World* [f], and the holy Angels in Heaven. When we ſay, that *in his Hands are all the Corners of the*

[e] 1 Cor. x. 11. [f] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

Earth,

Earth, and the Strength of the Hills is his alſo; we mean, that his Preſence and his Influence extend to the remoteſt and moſt inacceſſible Places; and there is none, where he cannot deliver or puniſh. When we call ourſelves *the People of his Paſture, and the Sheep of his Hand*; we own our Maker to be likewiſe our Preſerver, Supporter, and Director; who feeds our Souls by his Word and his Grace, as well as our Bodies with daily Bread, and guides us mercifully through this World to a better. *To-day if ye will hear his Voice, harden not your Hearts*, is an affecting and alarming Exhortation, that if we deſign ever to become his Servants in Earneſt, we ſhould hearken immediately to his continual Calls; elſe through a Habit of Diſobedience, our Minds may grow callous, and *paſt Feeling* [g]. The Words, *When your Fathers tempted me*, which are put into the Mouth of God himſelf, the *Jews*, (for whom firſt this Pſalm was compoſed) were to underſtand literally, of their Fathers according to the Fleſh. But we are to take them of thoſe, who have gone before us in the Profeſſion of Religion: and whom we are not to reſemble in *tempting and proving* God, that is, doubting,

[g] Eph. iv. 19.

and

and putting to unreaſonable Trials, his Omnipotence, his Goodneſs and Truth: leſt, as the unbelieving *Jews* died in the Wilderneſs, and ſo were excluded from the temporal Reſt, which otherwiſe they would have enjoyed in the Land of *Canaan*, we alſo be excluded from what it prefigured, that eternal *Reſt*, which *remains for the People of God* [h] in Heaven.

At the End of this and each Pſalm that we repeat, of whatever Nature it may be, we add the ſame Doxology, that we uſed at firſt: Glory being due to God, for every Thing he hath taught, and every Thing he hath done, both in former Times and preſent; for every Affliction, as well as every Enjoyment. And therefore we do well to obſerve the Apoſtle's Rule, of *giving Thanks always, for all Things, unto God and the Father, in the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt* [i].

Then we proceed to rehearſe the Pſalms, in proper Portions, according to the Days of the Month: of which it will be needful to ſay much more, than there is now Time to ſay. I ſhall therefore conclude with only remarking in general, that Words of God's own inſpiring

[h] Heb. iv. 9. [i] Eph. v. 20.

are

are ſurely the fitteſt to praiſe him in: which being ſo noble a Duty, we ſhould take peculiar Care to perform it in the moſt unexceptionable, judicious and affectionate Manner. *When you glorify the Lord, exalt him as much as you can; for even yet will he far exceed: and when you exalt him, put forth all your Strength, and be not weary; for you can never go far enough* [k].

[k] Ecclus xliii. 30.

SERMON VIII.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

——*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo.*

HAVING undertaken, firſt to ſhew the Lawfulneſs and Expediency of public Liturgies; then to vindicate, explain and point out ſuch Things in our own, as are moſt liable to be cenſured, or not underſtood, or not ſufficiently obſerved: I have finiſhed the former Head, and proceeded under the latter as far as the Pſalms; which very juſtly make a principal Part of the joint Praiſes, that we offer up to God. For though ſeveral of them were compoſed on particular Occaſions, yet they are plainly fitted for general Uſe; and their Inſer-

tion

tion into the Canon of Scripture proves them to be deſigned for it: the *Jews* anciently recited them in the Temple, and do ſtill in their Synagogues: the New Teſtament hath recommended them to Chriſtians; and the whole Church hath ſung them ever ſince. Indeed the ſubject Matter of them is very different: but thoſe of Joy are much more numerous, than any other Sort: and all of them afford Ground of Praiſe at leaſt; the doctrinal, the exhortatory, the hiſtorical, as well as the reſt. Even the plaintive and petitionary miniſter Cauſe of Thankſgiving to Him, who hath promiſed to hear, and ſupport, and deliver; and make *all Things work together for Good to them, that love him*[a]. Glory therefore to the bleſſed three in One is a fit Concluſion to every Pſalm.

But in reading them it muſt be carefully obſerved, and may with moderate Care be commonly diſtinguiſhed, in whoſe Perſon the ſeveral Sentences are ſpoken. In ſome Pſalms, or Portions of Pſalms, it is God or Chriſt, in others, wicked Men, that ſpeak. Theſe we muſt repeat, as their Sayings: and none as our own, but what were intended for us. Even the Words of the Pſalmiſt, if we are to adopt them,

[a] Rom. viii. 28.

may

may frequently ſeem ſo unapplicable to the outward Condition, or inward Frame, of many in every Congregation, that, if they attend to them, they cannot ſay them with Truth. But moſt of them all good People may ſay, even of themſelves ſingly, with much Truth. For they have conſtantly Enemies, temporal or ſpiritual, Afflictions more or leſs heavy, valuable Mercies, and at Times warm Feelings of pious Diſpoſitions: which, if not preſent, may be ſo recalled, and made their own again, as to be very ſincerely expreſſed to God. And what they cannot ſay in their own Name ſeparately, they may truly ſay in the Name of Chriſt's Church, of which they are Members: and they ought, and ſurely do, bear ſome Share of the Mercies and Sufferings, the Fears and Deſires of every Part of it, in every State. And as *David*, in ſome of the Pſalms, takes on him the Perſon of Chriſt; in others he ſeems to take that of his Diſciples: and to ſpeak, not in any one particular Character, but as repreſenting the whole Body of Believers. Or if there be any Paſſages, which neither of theſe Methods will ſuit; ſtill we may rehearſe them, as expreſſing the Caſe of ſome eminent Worthy of old Times, and be affected by it accordingly:

for we often are ſtrongly affected by the Circumſtances, well deſcribed, not only of diſtant, but of imaginary Perſons. We may conſider, as we go on, the Likeneſs, or the Difference, between his Situation, his Temper, and our own: and raiſe from it many Reflections of Sympathy and Caution, of Humiliation, Encouragement, and Thankfulneſs. Thus, at leaſt, we may bring every Thing we ſay, home to ourſelves: and by ſo doing furniſh our Minds with a moſt valuable Store of devout Thoughts and Language, perhaps for many future Occaſions of our own or others. For the Book of *Pſalms* is ſo inexhauſtible a Treaſure of every Branch of Piety, that a more conſtant Uſe of it, than of any other in the whole Bible, hath, with very juſt Reaſon, been appointed in public Forms of Prayer, and recommended in private ones.

It may be objected, that in ſeveral of them *David* utters moſt bitter Imprecations againſt his Enemies: in which, to ſay nothing harſher, we cannot follow him: for the Rule of the New Teſtament is, *Bleſs and curſe not* [b]. But indeed moſt, if not all, the Places, which appear Wiſhes of Evil, may, according to the

[b] Rom. xii. 14.

confeſſed

confeſſed Import of the Original, be underſtood only as Predictions of it. Or, ſuppoſing them Wiſhes, *David* might be directed by infinite Wiſdom to pronounce them, even againſt the Oppoſers of his reigning over *Iſrael*; who oppoſed, at the ſame Time, the known Decree of Providence. Repeating them in this View, ſolely as His, muſt be innocent: and ſtrongly ſuggeſt an important Admonition, *not to fight againſt God* [c]. But perhaps in ſome of theſe, as well as other Paſſages, he ſpeaks in the Perſon of the whole Church of God, againſt all its irreconcileable Adverſaries, whoever they be. Such was *Judas*: to whom therefore the two moſt dreadful of theſe Pſalms are applied, *Acts* i. 20. And, with the utmoſt Tenderneſs to the whole of God's Creation, we may and muſt deſire the Overthrow of Them, who obſtinately hate Him and his Laws. For though we ought much more to deſire the Repentance, than the Death of a Sinner, as He himſelf doth: yet if they will not repent, we ought to think and ſpeak with Approbation and Satisfaction, (yet mixed with an awful Concern,) of their Puniſhments here, and Sentence hereafter: which laſt St. *Paul* repreſents good Perſons, as joining

[c] Acts xxiii. 9.

to pronounce: *Do ye not know, that the Saints ſhall judge the World*[d]*?*

It may be objected further, that however this be, the *Pſalms* are unfit for Our Uſe on another Account: they are full of *Jewiſh* Notions and Phraſes. But they were compoſed by the Aid of the holy Spirit, with a View to Chriſtian Times: our Saviour appeals particularly to thoſe Things, *which are written in the Pſalms concerning him*[e], and they are many. Nor is the Difficulty great, in applying the Peculiarities of one Diſpenſation to what anſwers them in the other: of underſtanding by the Law, the Doctrine of Him, who came to fulfill it; by *Jeruſalem* and *Zion*, the Chriſtian Church; by the ſeveral Sacrifices, that of our bleſſed Lord, or of our own Prayers and Praiſes offered up in his Name; by the Altar, the holy Table; by temporal Enemies and Deliverances, ſpiritual ones; and ſo of the reſt: thanking God, at the ſame Time, that we have Light afforded us, to ſee ſo much deeper into this and every Book of the Old Teſtament, than they who wrote it.

Still there may be more Paſſages than a few in the Pſalms, which many underſtand not.

[d] 1 Cor. vi. 2. [e] Luke xxiv. 44.

However,

However, even theſe they may allowably read over, as undoubtedly they often do other Things, in Order and in Hope to underſtand them: and by reading with Attention, they will come gradually to underſtand more and more of them. But they would make this much eaſier to themſelves, by reading carefully in private ſome Paraphraſe of the Pſalms, if they are able to procure one, along with them: ſuch as the larger of Dr. *Hammond*, or rather of Biſhop *Patrick*, or the ſmaller of Dr. *Nicols* or Mr. *Johnſon*. The particular Paſſages, which one or other may find obſcure to him, are too many to be explained from hence. But the darkeſt and leaſt edifying in Appearance will, by the Uſe of any of theſe Authors, be perceived, either to have ſome one determined Senſe of Importance, or at leaſt to be capable of ſeveral ſuch.

And indeed all conſiderate Chriſtians will acknowledge the Excellence of the Pſalter in a good Tranſlation. But ſome object againſt that, which we have in our Prayer-Books, as made in Times of leſs Learning and Exactneſs, than the other in our Bibles: which, being more correct, they conceive ought to be uſed inſtead of it. But indeed, as the latter is, in ſome Places, juſter than the former; ſo is the

former, in ſome, juſter than that. And it hath one general Ground of Preference; that not rendering the Words of the *Hebrew* ſo ſtrictly, it gives the Senſe of them more intelligibly: notwithſtanding that a few Expreſſions, and but very few, are become in the Space of 200 Years, which have paſſed ſince it was made, leſs clear or proper than they were at firſt. Indeed this old Verſion hath here and there Additions to what we now find in the Original. But the only conſiderable one is taken from, if not warranted by, the New Teſtament: they are all harmleſs: they are moſt of them founded on Authorities not contemptible, particularly on that of the very ancient *Latin* Interpreter, departing from which, without Neceſſity, would have given Occaſion of Cavil to the *Romaniſts*. And as this Tranſlation in our Prayer-Books was made by Martyrs and Confeſſors for the Proteſtant Religion, ſo it was with Reaſon highly eſteemed by the People; and ſoon grew, by often repeating it, ſo familiar to them, that changing it for another, though ſomewhat better on the whole, would have been diſagreeable to them. Therefore the Senſe of both being ſufficiently the ſame, (as any one, by comparing them, will be convinced;) the Words, to which

which the Congregation were accuſtomed, have been retained to this Day.

It hath been objected farther, that, granting the Uſe of this Tranſlation to be juſtifiable, yet the Manner, in which we uſe it, is not. For we read it on, juſt as the Pſalms lie: and thus we blend together thoſe of joyful and thoſe of ſorrowful Import, without Diſtinction and without Method; yet we cannot be ſuppoſed to vary our Affections ſo quick, as this requires. But it ſhould be remembered, that on the principal ſtated Faſts and Feſtivals, and on all occaſional ones, Pſalms proper to them are appointed, out of the common Courſe. On Days indeed, which have nothing ſo particular in them, we follow the Order, in which they are ſet down. For we could not vary it, without omitting ſome of them, which none of them deſerve; or diſpoſing them in a Way intirely new. Now what that ſhould be, would be very hard to ſettle: and whatever was done, at leaſt as many Faults would be found then, as now. The preſent Arrangement is certainly older than our Saviour's Days: the public Offices of the whole Chriſtian Church have followed it from the very firſt Account of them, that we have: and why ſhould we make Alte-

rations, only to raiſe Perplexities? The Pſalms are indeed miſcellaneous. But ſo are many other Parts of Scripture. The Book of Proverbs is vaſtly more ſo. Yet no one objects againſt reading thoſe, as they lie. In Truth, ſcarce a Chapter of the Bible, or any Author whatever, can be read, but what calls for Variety of Diſpoſitions and Affections to be exerciſed, within a very ſmall Compaſs. Even in a ſhort Prayer is there not great Variety, if it be well conſidered? In Poetry and Muſic, theſe Tranſitions are often extremely abrupt and ſudden, from one Thing to its contrary in the higheſt Degree. Yet the Mind goes along with them very eaſily. Much more then may it do ſo, when prepared, as in the preſent Caſe, by a previous Knowledge of what is to come next, and long Practice in the Change. And if repeating the Pſalms in Courſe be right; we have certainly fixed a right Period of this Courſe, that of a Month: whereas the Church of *Rome* goes through them in a Week, which is making one Part of the Service too long; and the *Greek* Church in Twenty Days, which is making it hard to find. On the whole then, let us but be careful, that our Behaviour be as good in this Branch of Worſhip, as the Regulation

concerning it is: and notwithſtanding the unhappy Diſadvantage of barely ſaying, what ought to be enlivened by the Power of Harmony; we may ſtill, through God's Grace, be warmed and filled with his Spirit, while we *ſpeak to one another and ourſelves*, as the Apoſtle directs, *in Pſalms and Hymns and ſpiritual Songs, ſinging and making Melody*, if not with our Voices, yet *in our Hearts, to the Lord* [f].

After the Pſalms, it hath long been cuſtomary for the Organ, where one is uſed, to play for a ſhort Time. And as Inſtruments of Muſic in Divine Service are certainly lawful (elſe they had not been appointed in the *Jewiſh*, or permitted in the ancient Chriſtian Church [g], or deſcribed in the *Revelation* as accompanying the Praiſes of the bleſſed above;) ſo a little Pauſe, for the Uſe of this Inſtrument, will not only give ſome Reſpite and Refreſhment to the Congregation, and to the Miniſter; but may be advantageouſly employed, either to reflect on what is paſt of the Service, or prepare our Minds for what is to come. And therefore it

[f] Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.

[g] Ψαλμος εστιν ἡ δια τῳ οργανῳ τῳ μουσικῳ μελῳδια. Greg. Nyſſ. Tract. 2. in Pſalmos c. iii. §. 1. Ὁ ψαλμος λογος εστι μουσικος, ὁταν ευρυθμως κατα τους ἀριθμικους λογους προς το οργανον κρεκηται. Baſil in Pſ. 29. Suic. in voc.

ſhould

ſhould not be filled up either by the Performer with the lighter Airs of Muſic, inſtead of ſolemn Strains, and ſuch as may excite proper Diſpoſitions, or by any of the Congregation with needleſs Diſcourſe, or ſuch private Thoughts and Imaginations, as blot out good Impreſſions already made, and indiſpoſe us for receiving the like afterwards.

In the next Place follows a Leſſon, taken out of the Old Teſtament: and with this begins the third Part of the Office. That they, who are bleſſed with a Revelation from God, ſhould read and hear it with Reverence, when they aſſemble to worſhip him, is a plain Dictate of Reaſon and Religion. Accordingly the *Jews read Moſes and the Prophets in their Synagogues of old Time*, as the Book of *Acts* informs us [h]. And ſo indeed do Writers of their own, in the ſame Age with it [i]: who boaſt of the Practice, as a moſt uſeful and honourable Diſtinction, peculiar to their Nation, that the Laws of Life were thus publiſhed to all the People. The primitive Chriſtians, as one of the earlieſt Apologiſts for them, *Juſtin Martyr*, tells us, read at their Meetings, both the *Jewiſh* Prophets, and the Writings of the Apoſtles, in

[h] Acts xiii. 27. xv. 21. [i] Joſeph. contr. Ap. l. 2. § 18.

proper

proper Portions. And when the Church of *Rome* had broken them into ſmall Fragments, interrupted with other Things; and had continued to read even theſe in *Latin*, after it was no longer underſtood: our Church rectified both Errors; and hath taken Care, that the Old Teſtament ſhould be gone through once a Year, and the New thrice. Only we omit ſome Parts of the former; which are Repetitions of what is related in other Parts, or bare Liſts of Genealogies and Families, or too myſtical and abſtruſe to be edifying in public; on which laſt Account we omit alſo the Book of *Revelation*, excepting two or three Chapters: Matters of ſuch Difficulty being wiſely thought fitter for the private Meditation and Study of thoſe, who are qualified to engage in them.

The Order, in which the Books of both Teſtaments are read, is that, in which they ſtand. Only in the Old, the Prophet *Iſaiah*, containing the fulleſt Predictions of Chriſt's coming and Kingdom, is placed at the Approach of his Nativity: and in the New, the Goſpels and Acts are the Leſſons for the Morning, and the Epiſtles for the Afternoon. In this Manner we make Proviſion for every Day in the Year: and hence one great Recommendation of daily

Attendance

Attendance on public Prayers, (where there are Opportunities for it) is, that by Means of it we ſhall proceed regularly through the ſacred Writings, and preſerve the due Connexion of the ſeveral Diſcoveries, made in them to Man. But for the firſt Leſſons on Sundays, thoſe Chapters of the Old Teſtament are ſelected, which appeared to be moſt uſeful. The ſecond Leſſons being from the New, there was no Neceſſity, and little Room, for Choice. And to Holydays ſuch Portions of both are adapted, as beſt agree with the Occaſion.

But here we are accuſed of ſetting mere human Compoſitions on a Level with the Word of God, by taking Part of our Leſſons out of the *Apocrypha:* which alſo we are charged with frequently binding up in the ſame Volume with our Bibles. But ſo we ſometimes do our Prayer-Books likewiſe: yet we never dreamed of equalling either to Scripture. The Articles of our Church expreſsly diſtinguiſh the Apocrypha from it: the People of our Church know the Diſtinction. And that it may not fail to be known, they are marked at the Top of every Page with the Name, Apocrypha; which means, hidden; and, on whatever Account it was given to theſe Books, belongs to them on this;

this; that they are to be kept out of the Way, and not produced as Proof, when any Point of Doctrine or Duty is in Queſtion; whereas the Canonical Books are the Canon or Rule of Faith and Manners. The former therefore we read in the Congregation, not as Divine, but venerable for their Antiquity, and the Spirit of Religion that breathes in them. Still ſome Parts we paſs over, as leſs uſeful: ſome, for the Errors or Improprieties, which they contain: and ſome others, we own, require candid Interpretations. But there ſeems to be Ground for one ſuch Interpretation, which will remove a good many Objections at once: that ſome Relations of Things, which perhaps are not literally and hiſtorically true, poſſibly were never intended to be thought ſo; but written, like many other juſtly admired Pieces, for admonitory Fables or Parables. That the Doctrine of them in the Main is excellent, and the Narrations inſtructive, every one muſt own. They were quoted with Reſpect in the firſt Ages of Chriſtianity: they were read in public from very early Ages: it would have given great and needleſs Offence at the Reformation to have left them out intirely: and they are never appointed for the Lord's Day: by which Means, it may be, there

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are many Perſons in every Pariſh, who ſcarce ever heard an Apocryphal Leſſon in their Lives. At leaſt the ſecond Leſſons are always Canonical Scripture: of which a great deal more is read, beſides the *Pſalms*, (even in thoſe Churches of ours, which have not Week day Prayers,) than in any one Congregation of the Diſſenters. And therefore they have no Right to reproach us on the preſent Head.

But ſuppoſing we ſhould, any of us, apprehend, that this, or any Thing elſe, in the Service, mentioned or to be mentioned, might have been better ordered: yet we ſhould always think of the Judgement of others with proper Deference, and of our own with Modeſty. And ſo long as nothing is required of us, contrary to our Duty, we ſhould remember, that our Concern is much more to improve by every Thing, than to object againſt any Thing: by which laſt, unleſs done very diſcreetly, we may hinder, more than a little, our own Edification, and that of others.

Let us therefore attend ſeriouſly to the Leſſons read: but with diſtinguiſhed Reverence to thoſe of Scripture. We are admoniſhed in the Beginning of the Office, that one great End, for which *we aſſemble and meet together*, is *to hear*

hear God's moſt holy Word. We pray in the Concluſion of it, *that the Words, which we have heard with our outward Ears, may be inwardly grafted in our Hearts.* Both theſe Places mean, not the Sermon principally, but the Leſſons, the Pſalms, the Commandments, the Epiſtles, the Goſpels. The Diſcourſes indeed, which we deliver to you from hence, we truſt, are agreeable to God's Word: and we deſire you to judge of them by it. But Heaven forbid, that you ſhould equal or prefer them to it: as you certainly appear to do, if you hearken to our Sayings, and not to His. Think, I intreat you, then, whether you are not faulty in this Reſpect: whether you do not often let your Thoughts wander, without endeavouring to prevent it; whether you do not ſometimes forget yourſelves, and enter into Talk with one another; while *God's moſt holy Word* is reading to you. It is true, you can read it at Home. But whether you do or not, He and your own Conſciences beſt know. Or if you do: ſo you can Sermons too. And this would be an Excuſe equally, for not attending, or not regarding, either of them. But ſtill this is the Place, in which your Lord and Maſter hath commanded you to hear both: and hath promiſed

to

to be *in the Midſt of you* [k], and bleſs his Ordinances to you, if you uſe them as you ought. And what then is your Duty in ſuch a Caſe?

There are many Things in the Leſſons perhaps, that you do not underſtand: many, which, though you do underſtand them, yield you very little Inſtruction or Benefit. But attend to them diligently, weigh them deliberately, think how you may profit by them, conſult proper Perſons, or Books if you can, about them: and, by quick Degrees, you will both apprehend your Bible better, and eſteem it more; and reap ſuch Good from it, as probably you never imagined. At leaſt you will have done your utmoſt: and God will accept and reward you. I have given you Directions, at large, for the profitable Reading of Scripture, which may be applied, in a great Meaſure, to Hearing it, and muſt not now be repeated. But the principal Direction is, *Receive the Seed of the Word into an honeſt and good Heart:* and you will certainly *bring forth Fruit, with Patience,* unto everlaſting Life [l]. Say within yourſelves at the Beginning, with *Samuel, Speak, Lord, for thy Servant heareth* [m]. Say of the

[k] Matt. xviii. 20.
[l] Matt. xiii. 23. Luke viii. 15.
[m] 1 Sam. iii. 10.

more

more difficult Parts, with *David, Open mine Eyes, that I may see the wondrous Things of thy Law* [n]. Say of those, that try your Faith, with the poor Man in the Gospel, *Lord, I believe: help thou mine Unbelief* [o]. Say of those, that direct your Practice, with the People of *Israel, All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do* [p]. And be assured of becoming, though not skilful in curious, which St. *Paul* stiles, *foolish and unlearned, Questions* [q] and *doubtful Disputations* [r]; yet, what is infinitely better, humble and pious, and *wise unto Salvation* [s].

To each Lesson succeeds a Hymn or Psalm: conformably to a Decree of the Council of *Laodicea*, 1400 Years ago, that the public Reading of God's Word should be mixed with repeating his Praises: a most rational Combination, as well as refreshing Change.

The Hymn, called *Te Deum*, derives that Name from the first Words of it in the *Latin*: in which Language it was composed, about the Middle of the fourth Century; and hath been used by the whole Western Church, at least 1200 Years: in that of *Rome*, only on *Sundays* and Holydays, and not all those; but in ours

[n] Ps. cxix. 18. [o] Mark ix. 24. [p] Exod. xix. 8.
[q] 2 Tim. ii. 23. [r] Rom. xiv. 1. [s] 2 Tim. iii. 15.

every Day, as the ſingular Excellence of it well deſerves. It begins with equal Majeſty and Simplicity: *We praiſe thee, O God, we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.* And not we alone, but *all the Earth doth worſhip thee, the Father everlaſting:* every Corner of it having retained ſome Apprehenſions of a ſupreme Ruler; on which is founded that of St. *Paul* to the *Athenians, Whom therefore ye ignorantly worſhip, Him declare I unto you* [t]. But unſpeakably worthier Honours, than thoſe of poor Mortals, are inceſſantly paid him in Heaven by the holy Angels; mentioned in Scripture, and thence here, under the Names of *Cherubin and Seraphin*; the former denoting probably their unwearied Diligence to ſerve him, the latter their ardent Love to him: whoſe Acclamations therefore we humbly preſume to adopt, as we find them recorded in that lofty Deſcription of the Prophet. *I ſaw the Lord, ſitting upon the Throne, high and lifted up, and his Train filled the Temple. Above it ſtood the Seraphims: and one cried unto another and ſaid, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God of Hoſts: the whole Earth is full of his Glory* [u]. Where it muſt be obſerved, that for *God of Hoſts* in the Prophet, is *God of Sa-*

[t] Acts xvii. 23. [u] Iſ. vi. 1, 2, 3.

baoth

baoth in the Hymn; the latter being the *Hebrew* Word for the former: which both the *Greek* and *Latin* of the Old and New Teſtament having preſerved, as comprehending more than could be well expreſſed by a ſingle Term of any other Language; it is preſerved in the *Engliſh* alſo, both here, and in two Places of the Epiſtles [w]. And it ſignifies God to be the ſovereign Lord, of the *innumerable Company of Angels* [x]; of the Hoſt of Heaven, which the Heathen worſhipped, the Sun, Moon and Stars; of the Hoſts and Armies of all Nations on Earth; particularly the *Jewiſh* People, whom he led forth to Battle; and laſtly of the Chriſtian Church: which the Old Teſtament foretold ſhould be *terrible, as an Army with Banners* [y]; and the New deſcribes, as furniſhed with *Weapons of Warfare, mighty, through God, to the caſting down Imaginations and every high Thing that exalteth itſelf againſt the Knowledge of Him, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Chriſt* [z]. This therefore the Phraſe, *Lord God of Sabaoth*, means: not, as many imagine, (though it be a Truth, but a very inferior one,) that God is peculiarly *Lord*

[w] Rom. ix. 29. James v. 4. [x] Heb. xii. 22.
[y] Cant. vi. 4, 10. [z] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

of the Sabbath[a] Day. For the Words are intirely different in the Original, though ſomewhat alike in our Manner of writing them.

Nor are the Praiſes of God ſung in Heaven by the Angels alone, but by *the Spirits* alſo *of juſt Men made perfect*[b]; particularly, as we go on to ſpecify, *the Apoſtles, Prophets and Martyrs:* with whom the *holy Church* yet militant *throughout the World* aſpires to join, in celebrating *the Father of an infinite Majeſty; his honourable, true, and only Son,* compared with whom, the higheſt of all created Beings is unworthy of that Name; *alſo the holy Ghoſt, the Comforter* of every pious Soul. Then returning to *the Captain of our Salvation*[c], we thankfully own, that *when he took upon him to deliver Man* from Sin and its Puniſhment, *he did not abhor,* and diſdain, as beneath him, the Condeſcenſion of exchanging the Glories of the Godhead *for the Virgin's Womb*; and *when he had overcome the Sharpneſs of Death,* for Us, by ſuffering it himſelf, (which alludes to the Words, *O Death, where is thy Sting*[d]*?*) *he opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all Believers.* Not that we mean to ſay, it was not open at

[a] Mark ii. 28. Luke vi. 5. [b] Heb. xii. 23. [c] Heb. ii. 10. [d] 1 Cor. xv. 55.

all

all till then; whatever ſome ancient Fathers may have held[e]: any more, than that *Life and Immortality* were not at all *brought to Light* before *the Goſpel*[f]. But as the Light, which Men had antecedently to our Saviour's Coming, was augmented inexpreſſibly by it: ſo the Kingdom of Heaven was ſet open vaſtly wider, in Conſequence of his Sufferings, to receive Believers, not from one People only, and their Neighbours, but the whole Globe. To Him therefore, our Mediator now, *at the right Hand of God*, and who *ſhall come to be our Judge*, We addreſs our Prayers; that as *we magnify him Day by Day*, (and let us take Care to make good that Aſſertion,) ſo he would keep us *this* and every *Day without Sin*; reſtrain us from offending through Infirmity, as far as will be really for our inward Benefit, but eſpecially from wilful and preſumptuous Tranſgreſſion; and that his *Mercy* may *lighten*, that is, light or come, *upon us, as our Truſt is in Him.*

Inſtead of the *Te Deum*, another *Canticle*, or Song of Praiſe, much ancienter, and even more anciently inſerted into the Offices of the Church, is allowed to be ſubſtituted: which,

[e] Iræn. Tert. Athanaſ. Hieron. Aug. Ambr. Baſil. Greg. Thaum. Cyril Hieroſ. & Alex. See Suicer in ψυχη.
[f] 2 Tim. i. 10.

from the firſt Word of it in the *Latin*, bears the Name of *Benedicite*; and is taken from the Apocryphal Part of the Book of *Daniel*, where it is put into the Mouth of thoſe, who are commonly called the three Children, or young Men, whom *Nebuchadnezzar caſt into the fiery Furnace*[z]. It is now very ſeldom uſed, at leaſt in parochial Churches: but however contains a noble Acknowledgement of the Glory of God in his Works of Creation, the Memorial of which was the original Deſign of the Sabbath Day; and might be juſtly preferred to the former, whenever there is particular Occaſion to return Thanks for the Bleſſings of Nature. An Objection indeed hath been ſtarted, that in it we pray to the *Angels and Spirits of the Righteous*, to *bleſs the Lord*. And it might as well have been objected, that we pray to the *Winds and Fire, the Froſts and Snow*, to bleſs him. Plainly all this is no more than a Figure of Speech, though a very ſublime one: lending as it were a Tongue even to inanimate Creatures, and calling both on thoſe which do not, and thoſe which cannot, hear us, to glorify our common Maker; juſt as is done in the 148th Pſalm, of which this Canticle is an evident Imitation.

[z] Dan. iii. 21.

After

After the ſecond Leſſon, is appointed, either the Prophecy of *Zacharias* in St. *Luke*, or the 100th Pſalm: called for the Reaſon, which I mentioned before, *Benedictus* and *Jubilate*. The former was uttered on the Birth of *John* the Baptiſt: and is a Thankſgiving for the Redemption of Mankind, of which He was to publiſh the ſpeedy Approach. It copies very nearly the Stile of the *Jewiſh* Prophets, who deſcribed ſpiritual Bleſſings by temporal Images. Thus, meaning to praiſe *the Father of Mercies* [h] for delivering all Nations from the Dominion of the wicked one, it *bleſſes the Lord God of Iſrael, for ſaving his People from their Enemies, and the Hand of thoſe that hate them.* Now this Kind of Language was laid aſide after our Saviour's Aſcenſion: and therefore the Prophecy before us is not of later Date, but genuine. Yet it ſufficiently explains, to what Sort of *Salvation* it refers: by mentioning the *Remiſſion of Sins, the giving of Light to them that ſat in Darkneſs, and guiding their Feet into the Way of Peace.* And ſo it may teach us both the Fitneſs, and the Method, of aſſigning to the Old Teſtament Predictions an Evangelic Interpretation. You will be ſure, in repeating it, to re-

[h] 2 Cor. i. 3.

member, that the Words, *And thou, Child, ſhalt be called the Prophet of the Higheſt*, belong not to our Saviour, but the Baptiſt. And you will eaſily apprehend, that if in the Dawning, which preceded the *Sun of Righteouſneſs*[1], good *Zacharias* offered up his Thanks with ſuch Tranſport, we, to whom he ſhines out in full Splendor, ought to recite it with double Gratitude.

The 100th Pſalm, which, being ſomewhat ſhorter, and the Service long, we uſe the more frequently, is peculiarly proper after a Leſſon from the Goſpel, ſince it peculiarly relates to the Goſpel Times: as appears from its inviting *all Lands to be joyful in the Lord*, declaring them equally *God's People, and the Sheep of his Paſture*, and calling on them equally *to go into his Gates, and praiſe him for his Mercy and Truth.* And may we all accordingly ſo *praiſe* and ſerve him *in his Courts* here below, that we may for ever *dwell in his Tabernacle and reſt on his holy Hill*[k] above, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, &c.

[1] Mal. iv. 2. [k] Pſ. xv. 1.

SER-

SERMON IX.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

—*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo.*

I HAVE hitherto explained and vindicated the daily Service of our Church, as far as the Creed: which is placed between the third Part of it, the Leſſons; and the fourth, the Petitions: that we may expreſs that Faith in what we have heard, which is the Ground of what we are about to aſk. For as *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God* [a]: ſo we muſt *aſk in Faith*, if we *think to receive any Thing of the Lord* [b]. For *how ſhall we call upon Him, in whom we have not believed* [c]?

[a] Rom. x. 17. [b] James i. 6, 7. [c] Rom. x. 14.

But

But as all the Doctrines of Scripture, though equally true, are not of equal Importance; the more neceſſary Articles have been, from the Beginning of Chriſtianity, collected into one Body, called in Scripture, *the Form of ſound Words* [d], *the Words of Faith* [e], *the Principles of the Doctrine of Chriſt* [f]: but in our common Way of ſpeaking at preſent, the *Creed*, from the *Latin* Word, *Credo*, which ſignifies, *I believe*. Now the ancient Churches had many ſuch Creeds: ſome longer, ſome ſhorter; differing on ſeveral Heads in Phraſe, but agreeing in Method and Senſe: of which, that, called the *Apoſtles Creed*, is one. And it deſerves this Name, not ſo much from any Certainty, or great Likelihood, that the Apoſtles drew it up in theſe very Expreſſions; (though ſome, pretty early, and many ſince, have imagined they did) as becauſe it contains the chief Apoſtolic Doctrines; and was uſed by a Church, which, before it grew corrupt, was juſtly reſpected as the chief Apoſtolic Settlement; I mean, the *Roman*.

As *with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteouſneſs*, ſo *with the Mouth Confeſſion is made*

[d] 2 Tim. i. 13. [e] 1 Tim. iv. 6. [f] Heb. vi. 1.

unto

unto Salvation[g]: of which Confeſſion, repeating our Creed, though not a neceſſary, is a rational and commendable Act. We do not indeed find it to have made Part of the oldeſt public Offices: but ſurely it is full as proper for theſe, as for private Devotions; in which the primitive Chriſtians all ſaid it daily[h]. And as every one's Profeſſion of Belief is his own ſeparate Act, ſo the Creed is worded for every one ſeparately in the ſingular Number: and therefore unleſs we ſay it along with the Miniſter, he alone teſtifies His Faith; not We, Ours. Nor ſhould it by any Means be with Negligence and Indifference, that we profeſs our Faith. For what we believe is the only juſt Foundation of what we do, or hope, or fear. On this Account we ſtand at the repeating of the Creed: to expreſs our Steadfaſtneſs in it; and our Readineſs to *contend earneſtly*, in every proper Method, *for the Faith, once delivered to the Saints*[i]. Turning, at the ſame Time towards the Eaſt, as many do, is an ancient Cuſtom; as indeed, in moſt Religions,

[g] Rom. x. 10. [h] Symbolum quoque ſpecialiter debemus—antelucanis Horis quotidie recenſere. Ambroſ. de Virg. l. 3. p. 115. ap. *Bingh.* l. 10. c. 4. §. 17. Quis non quotidie recitat ore, Credo, &c. Lib. de duplici Martyrio, Cypriano falſo aſcript. in fine. [i] Jude ver. 3.

Men

Men have directed their Worſhip ſome particular Way. And this Practice being intended only to honour *Chriſt*, the Sun of Righteouſneſs, who hath riſen upon us, to enlighten us with that Doctrine of Salvation, to which we then declare our Adherence; it ought not to be condemned, as Superſtition: and yet, being neither obligatory in itſelf, nor commanded by Authority, the Omiſſion of it ought not to be cenſured as Irreverence or Diſobedience.

Another Thing, yet more uſual in ſaying the Creed, is to bow, when the Name of *Jeſus* is mentioned. And ſome have thought that to be their Duty, whenever it is mentioned, at leaſt in Divine Service: becauſe they find in their Bibles the Words, *that at the Name of Jeſus every Knee ſhould bow* [k]. But this is no ancient Notion: and the Generality of judicious Commentators allow it not to be the Meaning of the Place: a more exact Tranſlation of which would be, *that in the Name of Jeſus every Knee ſhould bow*, that is, every one ſhould pray: according to that other Paſſage of St. *Paul, I bow my Knees unto the Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that he would grant you, &c* [l]. However, it is a Practice of ſome Antiquity; and,

[k] Phil. ii. 10. [l] Eph. iii. 14.

whatever a few over-ſcrupulous People have imagined, ſurely a harmleſs one: For no Body means to worſhip the Sound; but the Perſon, whom it denotes. And though we confeſs, there is no more Reaſon to worſhip the Son of God, by bowing to him, than the Father; nor to worſhip him, on hearing the Name, *Jeſus*, than the Name, *Chriſt*: yet it is not good to be *contentious* about an innocent *Cuſtom*[m]; which alſo may help Attention, and increaſe Devotion. Beſides, it is authorized by the 18th Canon of our Church, which directs, that *when, in Time of Divine Service the Lord Jeſus ſhall be mentioned, due and lowly Reverence ſhall be done by all Perſons preſent, as it hath been accuſtomed.* Poſſibly theſe laſt Words may be deſigned to intimate, that Fear of giving Offence by leaving off the Cuſtom was a principal Motive to the Injunction. And if ſo, in Proportion as that Danger abates, the Injunction grows leſs important. Accordingly they, who are intruſted with the Execution of the Canons, have not lately, if ever, inforced it, or laid Streſs upon it. And indeed, as the greater Part of moſt Congregations diſregard it, except in the Creed, they ought not to judge hardly of thoſe,

[m] 1 Cor. xi. 16.

who

who omit it then alſo: however proper they may think it, for themſelves, to diſtinguiſh that Part of their Belief, which peculiarly belongs to them as Chriſtians, from the preceding, by this Geſture.

Having explained the Apoſtles Creed at large, in ſeveral Lectures on the Catechiſm, I ſhall add nothing more concerning it here. But there will be need to take ſome Notice of another, appointed to be rehearſed in its Stead, on the principal Feſtivals, and ſeveral other Holydays, and called the Creed of St. *Athanaſius*: not that he was the Author of it, though it was probably made pretty near, if not in his Time, who lived 1400 Years ago; but becauſe it expreſſes that Faith in the Trinity, of which he was a principal Defender. And as the *Romaniſts* threw on the Reformers of our Church all Manner of Calumnies, that they could, ſo it would have given them a great Handle againſt us, had this Creed, which they repeat every Sunday, been rejected or altered by us.

Many indeed have argued againſt the Uſe of it; and ſome, with ſtrange Vehemence: partly from the Doctrines, which it teaches; but chiefly from the Condemnation, which it pronounces

nounces on all, who diſbelieve them. Now the Doctrines are undeniably the ſame with thoſe, that are contained in the Articles of our Church, in the Beginning of our Litany, in the Concluſions of many of our Collects, in the *Nicene* Creed, and, as we conceive, in that of the Apoſtles, in the Doxology, in the Form of Baptiſm, in numerous Paſſages of both Teſtaments: only here they are ſomewhat more diſtinctly ſet forth, to prevent Equivocations. Any one, who examines into the Matter, will eaſily ſee it to be ſo. Accordingly our Diſſenting Brethren, after they had long objected to other Parts of our Liturgy, conſented readily to ſubſcribe this Creed: the Articles of which are the common Faith of the Catholic Church, or by immediate Conſequence deducible from it; and little or nothing more. There are indeed ſeveral Things in them, beyond our Comprehenſion, as to the Manner: but the Scripture hath the ſame. There are Expreſſions, which may ſeem liable to Exception: but it muſt be for Want of underſtanding them, or admitting fair Interpretations of them. The Aſſertion, that *there is one Father, not three Fathers*, and ſo on, may appear to the Ignorant, needleſs and trifling: but was levelled againſt Hereſies, then in Being, which

which took away all Diſtinction between the three Perſons. That *none is before or after other*, means, (as the following Words, *but the whole three Perſons are coeternal*, prove,) that none is ſo in Point of Time, not that none is ſo in the Order of our Conceptions: for the Scripture directs us to conſider the Father, as firſt. That *none is greater or leſs than another*, is reconciled to our Saviour's Aſſertion, *The Father is greater, than I*[n], by what follows in the Creed, *Equal as touching his Godhead, inferior as touching his Manhood.* That he is *one, altogether, not by Confuſion of Subſtance, but by Unity of Perſon*, means, (for ſo the next Words explain it,) that as each of Us is one Man, not at all by blending the Soul and Body into one Subſtance, for they are ſtill diſtinct, but *altogether*, by a myſterious Union of the two: ſo he is one Chriſt, not at all by blending the Divine and Human Nature into one Subſtance, but altogether, intirely and ſolely, by an Union of Them, yet more myſterious than the former is.

The Condemnation, contained in two or three Clauſes of this Creed, belongs, (as the moſt zealous Defenders of our Faith in the holy Trinity agree, and as every one, who reads it con-

[n] John xiv. 28.

ſiderately,

ſiderately, will ſoon perceive,) not to all, who cannot underſtand, or cannot approve, every Expreſſion in it; but only to ſuch, as deny in general *the Trinity in Unity*, or three Perſons, who are one God. *This* alone is ſaid to be *the Catholic Faith*. The Words, that follow after, *For there is one Perſon of the Father*, and ſo on, are deſigned only to ſet this forth more particularly. And the Concluſion from the whole is, not that *in all Things*, which are *aforeſaid*, by the Uſe of every Term above mentioned, but *in all Things*, AS IS *aforeſaid, the Unity in Trinity is to be worſhipped:* meaning, that as at firſt it was ſaid, that in all Acts of Faith we are to believe in each Perſon, ſo here it is added, that in all Acts of Worſhip we are to adore each: never conſidering one, even while addreſſed diſtinctly, as ſeparated or ſeparable from the other two. Now this Trinity in Unity we apprehend to have been, ever ſince it was fully revealed, a fundamental Article of the Chriſtian Faith. And yet thoſe, who believe not even ſo much, the Creed no otherwiſe teaches *cannot be ſaved*, or *ſhall without Doubt periſh*, than as our Saviour teaches concerning the whole of the Goſpel: *He that believeth, and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved: but he, that believeth not, ſhall*

be damned [o]. Our Condemnation is no more hard and uncharitable, than His. And neither is ſo: becauſe both are to be interpreted with due Exceptions and Abatements. Suppoſe a Collection of Chriſtian Duties had been drawn up; and it had been ſaid, in the Beginning or at the End of it, *This is the Catholic* Practice, *which except a Man* obſerve *faithfully, he cannot be ſaved:* would not every one underſtand, that Allowance muſt be made for ſuch Things, as a Man through involuntary Ignorance miſtook, or through mere Infirmity failed in, or was truly ſorry for, as far as he knew he had Cauſe? Why then are not the ſame Allowances to be underſtood, in ſpeaking of Doctrines? For when the Creed ſays, that *Whoever will be ſaved, before all Things it is neceſſary that he hold the Catholic Faith*; it doth not mean, that true Faith is more *neceſſary*, than right Practice: but that naturally it precedes it, and is to be firſt learnt in order to it. The Intention therefore of the Creed, as well as of our Lord in the Goſpel, is only to ſay, that whoever rejects the Doctrine of it, from preſumptuous Self-Opinion, or wilful Negligence; and doth not afterwards repent of theſe Faults; particularly, if he is made

[o] Mark xvi. 16.

ſenſible

ſenſible of them; or if not, at leaſt in general, amongſt his unknown Sins; the Caſe of ſuch a one is deſperate. But if Want of Information, Weakneſs of Apprehenſion, or even excuſable Wrongneſs of Diſpoſition, ſhould make him doubt or diſbelieve any or the main Part of this Creed; nay, which is vaſtly a worſe Caſe, the whole Revelation of Chriſtianity: though we paſs Judgement on his Errors without Reſerve; and, in general, on all who maintain them; yet perſonally and ſingly we preſume not to judge of his Condition in the next World. *To his own Maſter he ſtandeth or falleth* [p]. Much leſs would we think unfavourably of any one, who takes theſe condemning Clauſes in too rigorous a Senſe, and therefore only is afraid, from a Spirit of Charity and Humility, to join in them. Indeed, for the Sake of ſuch, it may ſeem Pity, but either they had been originally omitted; (ſince though defenſible, they are not neceſſary to be inſerted in a Profeſſion of Faith;) or the Limitations, with which they are to be underſtood, had been ſignified in two or three comprehenſive Words.

After our Creed, we go on to our Petitions. In theſe, the Miniſter and People firſt recom-

[p] Rom. xiv. 4.

mend each other to our bleſſed Redeemer, in Terms of Scripture, which a Council, held near 1200 Years ago [q], affirms to be uſed for this Purpoſe by the Direction of the Apoſtles, and may certainly well be uſed ſo without it: *The Lord be with you* [r]: *And with thy Spirit* [s]: Then we make a direct Application to him, under the Names of *Lord* and *Chriſt*, repeating it thrice, as a Mark of our Earneſtneſs, that he would *have Mercy upon us*: Words often addreſſed to him, when on Earth; often ſolemnly reiterated by the whole ancient Church, and ſpoken by the *Latin* Church in the orignal *Greek* of the New Teſtament, Κυριε ελεησον [t], but much more prudently tranſlated by ours into *Engliſh*.

This done, as before we ſubjoined the Lord's Prayer to our Confeſſion, to obtain the Confirmation of our Pardon; ſo now we prefix it to our Requeſts, as a Summary of our Deſires. And ſurely ſaying it again at ſuch a Diſtance, and with ſo different a View, cannot be thought a *vain Repetition* [u].

After theſe general Prayers, we expreſs to God diſtinctly, in ſhort Sentences, the ſeveral

[q] Conc. Bracarenſe 1. A. D. 563. Can. xxi. [r] 2 Theſſ. iii. 16. [s] 2 Tim. iv. 22. [t] Matt. xv. 22. xx. 30, 31. [u] Matt. vi. 7.

Heads

Heads of the Supplications, which we are about to offer up more at large, for Peace, and Grace, for the King, the Clergy, and the People. And all theſe Sentences are conceived in Words taken from the *Pſalms:* excepting one, *Give Peace in our Time, O Lord*; which hath a Reaſon added to it, by ſome thought improper; *Becauſe there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God:* whereas, ſay they, we often have others to fight for us; and if we had Him alone, why ſhould we deſpond, and immediately pray for Peace upon it? But theſe Objectors utterly miſtake our Meaning: which is, that whatever Help we have beſides, we look upon it as nothing, without that of the Almighty; whom therefore we beg, in the Words which they unjuſtly blame, when we are in Peace, to continue it, by reſtraining ſuch as would diſturb it; and when we are not, to reſtore it, by turning the Hearts, or overthrowing the Attempts, of thoſe who have infringed it.

In Conſequence of theſe Preparations, the Petitions themſelves follow: not in one long Prayer, but ſeveral ſhort ones; which Method is certainly as lawful as the other; and, we think, more expedient. It reminds us oftener of the Attributes of God, and Merits of Chriſt,

which are the Ground of our *asking in Faith* [v]: and by the Frequency of saying, *Amen*, it stirs up our Attention, and warms our Devotion, which are too apt to languish. These short Prayers have the Name of Collects: either from their collecting much good Matter, particularly out of Scripture, into a small Compass; or from their being originally composed for the People to use, when collected and assembled together. And the first of these Collects is, That for the Day. Besides the Lord's Day, which is the weekly Memorial of all God's Goodness to Us, and our Duty to Him, we have annual ones, to celebrate, not only the principal Parts of the History of Christ, but also the holy Lives and Deaths of his chief Followers, who are mentioned in the New Testament. For, as *the Righteous* are to *be had in everlasting Remembrance* [x]; and the Epistle to the *Hebrews* particularly directed the first Christians to *remember them, which had had the Rule over them, who had spoken unto them the Word of God* [y]: as they did accordingly pay distinguished Honours to the Memories of the Apostles, Evangelists and Martyrs: and as the Church of *Rome*, which had gone much too far in this

[v] James i. 6. [x] Ps. cxii. 6. [y] Heb. xiii. 7.

Matter,

Matter, would notwithſtanding have had a great Advantage againſt us, if we had neglected it intirely; we do therefore, on the Days, which bear their Names, read Portions of holy Writ relating to them, return Thanks to God for their Labours and Example; and beg, that we may profit ſuitably by them. This then makes a conſiderable Proportion of the variable Collects. The reſt are appointed, one for each *Sunday* and Week in the Year. And the Intention, however imperfectly executed, muſt have been, that ſometimes praying more explicitely for this Grace or Mercy, ſometimes for that, we may be likelier to obtain, through God's Goodneſs, all that are needful for us.

The Objection, that our Service is taken from the *Popiſh*, affects chiefly the Collects. But thoſe of ours, which are the ſame with theirs, are moſtly derived from Prayer-Books, brought over in the Days of that Pope, by whoſe Means our *Saxon* Anceſtors were converted to Chriſtianity, above 1100 Years ago: and they were old ones then; much older, than the main Errors of Popery. However, partly at, and partly ſince, the Reformation, ſuch of the Collects in thoſe Books, as wanted and deſerved it, have been carefully corrected; many, that were thought

improper, quite removed; and new ones framed in their Stead. But why ſhould thoſe be changed, which are both faultleſs in themſelves, and recommended by venerable Antiquity?

After the Collect for the Day, come two conſtant ones, to be uſed every Day, *for Peace and Grace:* general Words, comprehending between them all Bleſſings, temporal and ſpiritual. In the former, which is tranſlated from the ancient *Latin* Offices, we beſeech God, *in the Knowledge of whom ſtandeth our* Hope of *eternal Life* hereafter, and *whoſe Service*, in proportion as we improve in it, gives us here *perfect Freedom* from the Tyranny of Sin, and the Stings of an evil Conſcience, would likewiſe ſo *defend us in all Aſſaults of our* outward *Enemies, that truſting in* Him, *we may not fear* Them. Thus we embolden ourſelves from the Conſideration of his greater Mercies, to hope for the leſſer: In Imitation of the Apoſtle's Reaſoning, *He that ſpared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us, how ſhall he not with him alſo freely give us all Things*[z]*?* The latter of theſe Collects is not taken from the *Roman*, but principally from the *Greek* Service, as others of our Prayers beſides are: the Compilers of

[z] Rom. viii. 32.

our

our Liturgy prudently extracting, from both, what was proper to enrich and add Authority to the Work, in which they were engaged. And it begs that Protection of God more eſpecially for the preſent Day, which the former begs in general: but above all, *that we may fall into no Sin* even undeſignedly, much leſs *run into any Kind of Danger* of it wilfully, but *do always what is righteous in his Sight.*

After theſe Collects, follows, on *Sundays*, *Wedneſdays*, and *Fridays*, the Litany. But I ſhall ſpeak of that hereafter, God willing; and proceed now with the ſtated Service of the other Days of the Week: in which, having put up the before-mentioned Prayers for ourſelves, we begin our Interceſſions for other Perſons; and firſt for *the King, as ſupreme*[a]: in Obedience to the Apoſtle's Injunctions[b], and in Imitation of the primitive Chriſtians, even while they lived under Heathen Emperors. The Duties of that Station being very important and difficult, and the Hazards of erring and ſinning in it many and great, We therefore pray Him, who is *the only Ruler* of the Heart and Conduct *of Princes*, and *beholds* the State of *all the Dwellers* in their Dominions every where *on Earth, to repleniſh*

[a] 1 Pet. ii. 13. [b] 1 Tim. ii. 1.

our Sovereign, both *with the Graces and the Gifts*, needful for him: *to grant him long to live in Health and Wealth*; that is, Prosperity; as we pray God, in the Litany, *to deliver us in all Time of our Tribulation, in all Time of our Wealth; to strengthen him, that he may overcome all his Enemies*, all that wish ill to Him or his People; and finally to bestow on him *everlasting Felicity*.

Then, because the Royal Family are the future Hopes of the Public, and in the mean while their whole Behaviour is of very great Consequence to it: we apply more distinctly than the ancient Church did, but surely with Reason, to *the Fountain of all Goodness*, who therefore is able to supply the Branches, as well as the Root, for such Blessings on every Branch, especially the principal by Name, as their Condition requires.

After this, we pray for the whole Clergy and People of our Land: that he, *who alone worketh great Marvels*; who hath in all Ages marvellously protected his Church against the Devil and wicked Men; who endued his Apostles with marvellous and miraculous Gifts on the Day of *Pentecost*, and by their Means many others; who doth and ever will produce marvellous

vellous Effects on the Hearts of Believers by the Miniſtry of his Word and Sacraments, and who only can do ſuch Things; would *ſend down the healthful*, that is, the healing, ſtrengthening and ſaving, *Spirit of his Grace, on all Biſhops and Curates*; Perſons, to whom the Cure or Care of Souls is intruſted; for this the Word, *Curate*, ſignifies throughout the Prayer Book, not merely thoſe Miniſters who aſſiſt the proper Incumbent; and likewiſe on *all Congregations committed to their Charge*. And we further beſeech him not only to beſtow on them at firſt good Diſpoſitions; but (*that they may truly* and laſtingly *pleaſe him*) *pour upon them his continual Bleſſing*, like a kindly *Dew* deſcending from above. *For neither is he that planteth any Thing, neither he that watereth, but God, that giveth the Increaſe*[c].

Next to this, *in the Time of War*, we addreſs ourſelves to the *Almighty Governor of all Things*, whoſe *Juſtice in puniſhing* us *Sinners* with this Evil we acknowledge, and whoſe *Mercy* to deliver us from it, on our *true Repentance*, we hope for, and cannot hope for it elſe: complaining of the *Pride* and *Malice of our Enemies*; of which they muſt be guilty, if

[c] 1 Cor. iii. 7.

the

the War on our Side be lawful, otherwiſe there would be Peace: and in the genuine Spirit of Chriſtianity intreating, that the one may be *abated*, the other *aſſwaged*; which is praying for Them, as well as ourſelves. And till they ſuffer their Diſpoſitions to be mended, We beg that their *Devices* and Enterprizes may be *confounded:* which Word, as dreadful as it ſounds too often in paſſionate common Speech, means here no more than, diſappointed: and this is the worſt we wiſh, even to thoſe *who hate us and deſpitefully uſe us* [d].

There is alſo appointed a very fit *Prayer to be read during the Seſſion of Parliament*, for a Bleſſing on their Conſultations. But here it may be aſked, how the Compilers of it could venture to call in it every one of our Kings, in all Time to come, *moſt religious*. Now certainly they did not intend to propheſy, that, in the common Meaning of the Word, they always would be ſo: nor yet to require, that we ſhould call them ſo in a Senſe, that was not true. And therefore they muſt either mean by *Religious*, (what it ſometimes means in the Language, from which it is derived,) the Object of moſt awful Regard, ſacred, a Title fre-

[d] Matt. v. 44.

quently

quently aſcribed to Kings: or indeed rather, *moſt religious* muſt be underſtood in the ſame Manner, as the next Word to it, *Gracious*, conſtantly is, without the leaſt Difficulty or Scruple, both in the Liturgy and out of it; and as the Titles, *moſt Chriſtian*, and, *moſt Catholic* are; to denote the good Qualities, which Princes profeſs, and ſhould have; and therefore their Subjects are willing and ought to hope they have; and by reminding them, endeavour that they may have. Accordingly this very Epithet, *moſt religious*, was conſtantly aſcribed to all ſucceſſive Emperors in St. *Chryſoſtom*'s and St. *Baſil*'s Liturgies, the common ones of the *Greek* Church, as it is to all ſucceſſive Kings in ours. The Intention being thus cleared, the Lawfulneſs of joining in the Expreſſion is evident. In the Prudence of chuſing it originally we are leſs concerned. Yet in Defence of that we may plead, that this Prayer was compoſed and originally uſed in the Reign of a Prince, acknowledged to be unfeignedly religious, King *Charles* the firſt[e]. And whatever Scruples have been raiſed concerning the Propriety of this Part of it in ſome Reigns ſince, happily there is no Room for them in the preſent.

[e] See Wilkins Conc. Vol. 4. p. 539.

After

After theſe particular Interceſſions, we add a general one for all Mankind, eſpecially for all Chriſtians, and moſt eſpecially for all that are in Affliction: to which we ſubjoin as general a Thankſgiving for all God's Mercies to Us and Them; but above all, for That, which gives us a Claim to eternal Happineſs. Neither of theſe Forms is taken from any other Liturgy: both are excellent: and every one, who deſires it, may, by ſignifying that Deſire, have a ſeparate Share in either. This Proviſion is a very uſeful and comfortable one: and we exhort you, on all fit Occaſions to take the Advantage of it. Only we muſt beg, that they, who have received Benefit by being prayed for, will not forget to return Thanks; but conſcientiouſly avoid our Saviour's Reproof: *Were there not ten cleanſed? But where are the nine*[t]?

The general Thankſgiving may perhaps to ſome appear ſuperfluous, after we have thanked and praiſed God in the Uſe of the Pſalms and Hymns. But it was inſerted at the Reſtoration, becauſe others complained it was wanting. And indeed it is a more methodical Summary of the ſeveral Mercies of God *to Us and to all Men*, than we had before: it furniſhes an Opportu-

[t] Luke xvii. 17.

nity

nity of thanking him more expreſsly for the late Inſtances of his *loving Kindneſs* to the Members of our own Congregation: and beſides, as we cannot be too thankful to God; the Acknowledgements, which we offered up in the Beginning of the Service, are very properly repeated in the End. For ſurely we ought to aſk nothing of God, without remembering, what we have received from him: which naturally excites both our Faith and Reſignation; and prepares the Way for that admirable Collect, with which we conclude.

It is taken from the Middle of St. *Chryſoſtom*'s Liturgy: but much more judiciouſly placed in the Cloſe of ours. It firſt thankfully confeſſes the great Goodneſs of our bleſſed Redeemer, in diſpoſing our Minds, of themſelves ſo variouſly and wrongly inclined, to aſk unanimouſly of Him ſuch Things as we ought, and encouraging our Applications by ſuch explicit Aſſurances of hearing us. Then it ſubmits entirely to his Wiſdom, in what Manner, and how far, he will think it for our Good to grant us any of our particular Requeſts; begging nothing abſolutely, but what he hath abſolutely engaged to beſtow on our Prayers and Endeavours; *viz.* that practical *Knowledge* here *of his Truth*, his

Doctrines

Doctrines and Precepts, his Promiſes and Threatenings, that hereafter we may attain *everlaſting Life* and Happineſs.

Theſe Things done, it can only remain, that on departing from God's more immediate Preſence in his Church, we intreat for ourſelves and one another, (as we do accordingly in the Words of Scripture [s]) the continual Preſence of the Holy Trinity, wherever we go: that *Grace of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, which will ſecure us *the Love of God* the Father, and *the Fellowſhip*, that is, the Communication of the needful Warnings and Aſſiſtances *of the holy Ghoſt*.

Now *what we* thus *faithfully aſk, may we effectually obtain, to the Relief of our Neceſſity, and the ſetting forth of God's Glory, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.*

[s] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

SER-

SERMON X.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

——*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo.*

THE Liturgy of our Church has now been explained to you, as far as the End of the Morning Prayer. The Evening Prayer hath nothing different from it; excepting the Hymns, that follow the Leſſons, and the two Collects after that for the Day.

The Hymn after the firſt Leſſon, called *Magnificat*, from the Word, with which it begins in the *Latin*, was uſed anciently by the Weſtern Church; and continues to be uſed by the Proteſtants Abroad. It is the Song of the bleſſed

Virgin, recorded by St. *Luke* [a], on the Confirmation which ſhe received, at *Elizabeth*'s Houſe, of what the Angel had told her, that ſhe ſhould become the Mother of our Lord, by the Operation of the holy Ghoſt: and it expreſſes moſt naturally the Tranſport, which on that Occaſion ſhe muſt feel; but, like the Hymn of *Zacharias*, in Phraſes of the Old Teſtament, to be interpreted from the New; of which Matter I have already ſpoken.

My Soul doth magnify the Lord, doth acknowledge the infinite Greatneſs of his Power and Mercy: *for he hath regarded the Lowlineſs of his Hand-maiden*; that is, the *low Eſtate*; for ſo the Original ſignifies, and ſo it is expreſſed in our Bibles; not the Humility of Mind, which the holy Virgin was too humble to aſcribe to herſelf. *From henceforth all Generations ſhall call me bleſſed:* as We do accordingly, both by repeating this Hymn, and in our common Speech. *For he, that is mighty, hath magnified me*, hath raiſed me to great Honour: *and holy is his Name*; his Truth, his Juſtice, his Mercy, his Concern for the Goodneſs as well as Happineſs of his Creatures, are glorioufly manifeſted in this wonderful Diſpenſation. *He*

[a] i. 46—55.

hath

hath ſhewed in Times paſt, and will as certainly now, as if it were done already, *Strength with his Arm*, ſupernatural Deeds performed by his Power, for the Erection of the Kingdom of his Son: and hath often, and will again, *ſcatter* and defeat *the proud* Oppoſers of it, by Means of thoſe very *Imaginations of their Hearts*, in which they exult. *The mighty* amongſt the Jews and Heathen *ſhall be put down from their Seat, and humble and meek* Chriſtians *exalted* in their Stead. *They, that hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs* [b], ſhall be *filled with* ſpiritual *good Things; and the Rich*, that rely on the vain and falſe Treaſures of their own Wiſdom and Merit, he will convict of being *poor and blind and naked* [c], *and* ſo *ſend* them *empty away. He hath holpen his Servant Iſrael*, all that by obeying him become his People, *as he promiſed to our Forefathers, Abraham* the Father of the Faithful, *and his* true *Seed*; thus *remembering his* covenanted *Mercy*, which ſhall laſt *for ever*. This is the Triumph of the holy Virgin: and every Part of it ſhould be our own likewiſe. For God *hath regarded our low Eſtate*, together with Her's, and *magnified* us, and made us

[b] Matt. v. 6. [c] Rev. iii. 17.

bleſſed. And we ſhould magnify and bleſs Him continually for it.

Inſtead of this Hymn, our Prayer Book tells us, may be uſed, and in ſome Places it frequently is, the 98th Pſalm: in which we exhort one another to *ſing unto the Lord a new Song*; Words, denoting, in the Book of *Revelation* [d], Goſpel Praiſes: and we foretell that *all Lands* ſhall join in it, *with Trumpets and Shawms*, another Inſtrument of Wind-Muſic, which in our Bible is called a Cornet: whence we may conclude, if it needed Proof, that muſical Inſtruments are lawful in Chriſtian Worſhip. This future Time of univerſal Thankſgiving is deſcribed to be, when God ſhall *remember*, that is, ſhall give Evidence that he hath never forgot, *his Mercy and Truth towards the Houſe of Iſrael*, according to the Fleſh; and not only they, but *all the Ends of the World ſhall ſee his Salvation.* No Wonder, that even the irrational and inanimate Parts of Nature are called upon by a lofty Figure of Speech, to celebrate that glorious Day: *the Sea* to *make a Noiſe, and all that therein is*; *the Floods* to *clap their Hands, and the Hills to be joyful together before the Lord:* partly for the preſent Happineſs of that Period, in which

[d] v. 9. xiv. 3.

poſſibly

poſſibly the loweſt of God's Works may ſhare; but chiefly for the Approach of the next and concluding Scene of Providence, when he ſhall *come* finally, *with Righteouſneſs to judge the World, and the People with Equity.*

After the ſecond Leſſon, is appointed another Hymn, uſed by the ancient Church, in their private Devotions at leaſt; and by the preſent *Greek* and foreign Reformed, as well as ours and the *Romiſh*, in their public ones; and called from the *Latin* Beginning of it, *Nunc dimittis.* It expreſſes the Gratitude of good old *Simeon, a juſt Man and devout,* as we read in St. *Luke*[e], *and waiting for the Conſolation of Iſrael; to whom it was revealed, that he ſhould not die, till he had ſeen the Lord's Chriſt.* Accordingly *he came by the Spirit into the Temple: and when the Parents brought in the Child Jeſus, he took him up in his Arms,* (image to yourſelves the Scene, I beg you) *and bleſſed God, and ſaid: Lord, now letteſt thou thy Servant depart in Peace,* that is, in Comfort; *according to thy Word; for mine Eyes have ſeen thy Salvation, which thou haſt prepared* to ſet *before the Face of all People.* And the following Sentence hath a ſtrong Appearance of being deſigned by the holy Ghoſt

[e] Luke ii. 25—32.

to intimate, (whether the Speaker of it perceived the Deſign or not,) that, contrary to the expected and natural Order of Things, Chriſt ſhould firſt *be a Light to lighten the Gentiles*; then afterwards, *the Glory of God's People Iſrael.* To perceive the Fitneſs of *Simeon*'s Thankſgiving for our Uſe, it needs only be remembered, and ever ſhould in repeating it, that we alſo *have ſeen the Lord's Salvation.* For though we have not yet beheld our Saviour with our bodily Eyes; to that of Faith he is exhibited continually in the Goſpel Hiſtory and Sacraments; we may meet him in his Church, we may converſe with him in our private Meditations. And this we ſhould think Happineſs enough for us here, whatever elſe we want or ſuffer; and be always prepared, and always willing, to *bleſs God,* and *depart in Peace.*

For this Hymn we are allowed to uſe, and ſometimes do, the 67th Pſalm: which is a prophetic Prayer, that, through *the Light of God's Countenance,* his gracious Illumination, *the Way* of his Providence and Man's Duty to him *may be known on Earth, his ſaving Health,* the Means by which he heals and ſaves Mens Souls, *to all Nations:* who are invited to *rejoice and be glad,* becauſe *he ſhall judge the Folk righteouſly;*

ouſly; ſhall govern and reward the People of the World, (for ſo the Word, *Folk*, ſignifies, and was not a low Expreſſion formerly,) by the equitable and merciful Rules of Chriſtianity. For *then*, on our doing this, *the Earth ſhall bring forth her Increaſe* more plentifully; *and God, even our own God, ſhall give us his Bleſſing*, temporal and ſpiritual: *for Godlineſs hath Promiſe of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come*[r].

The former of the two Collects, peculiar to Evening Prayers, is taken from a *Latin* Form, at leaſt 1100 Years old. It begs for the greateſt of Bleſſings here below, that joyful Peace of Mind, which our Saviour promiſed his Diſciples: *Peace I leave with you: my Peace I give unto you: not as the World giveth, give I unto you*[s]. And ſince it cannot be obtained, but by *holy Deſires*, *good* and prudent *Counſels* for the Execution of them, *and juſt Actions*, done in Conſequence of both; ſo we petition Him, *from whom all* theſe *proceed*, to grant it us by Means of them; that *our Hearts being ſet* by his Grace *to keep his Commandments*, and our Ways *defended* by his Providence *from the Fear of our Enemies*, we may find *the Work of Righteouſneſs*,

[r] 1 Tim. iv. 8. [s] John xiv. 27.

Peace; and its Effect, Quietneſs and Aſſurance for ever [h].

The latter Collect, taken in Part from an Office of the *Greek* Church, prays more particularly for the Safety of the enſuing Night: that God's Favour may ſhine upon us, and *lighten our Darkneſs*; that is, protect us, while we are unable to help ourſelves, or even to know our Danger. The ſame Phraſe is twice uſed in the Book of Pſalms. *Unto the Godly there ariſeth up Light in Darkneſs* [i]. And again, *The Lord ſhall make my Darkneſs to be Light* [k].

Next to the Morning and Evening Service in our Prayer-Book ſtands *the Litany*, or more earneſt Supplication for averting God's Judgements, and procuring his Mercy. This Earneſtneſs, it was thought, would be beſt excited and expreſſed by the People's interpoſing frequently to repeat with their own Mouths the ſolemn Form of *beſeeching* God to *deliver* and to *hear* them: in which however the Miniſter is underſtood to join equally; as the Congregation are in every Particular ſpecified by him. Such Litanies have been uſed in the Church at leaſt 1400 Years. And they were appointed firſt for *Wedneſdays* and *Fridays*, theſe being

[h] Iſ. xxxii. 17. [i] Pſ. cxii. 4. [k] Pſ. xviii. 28.

appro-

appropriated to Penitence and Humiliation, and for other Faſts: but not long after for *Sundays* alſo; there being then the largeſt Congregation, and moſt ſolemn Worſhip; and our Litany is further directed to be uſed at ſuch other Times, as the Ordinary ſhall think proper. Originally it was intended for a diſtinct Service; to come after the Morning Prayer, as the Rubric of our Liturgy ſtill directs, and before the Office for the Communion, at a proper Diſtance of Time from each: of which Cuſtom a few Churches preſerve ſtill, or did lately, ſome Remains. But in the reſt, Convenience or Inclination hath prevailed to join them all three together: excepting that in ſome Places there is a Pſalm or Anthem between the firſt and ſecond; and between the ſecond and third almoſt every where: beſides that the latter Part of the Morning Prayer is, moſt of it, ordered to be omitted, when the Litany is ſaid with it. But ſtill by this cloſe Conjunction ſeveral Things may appear improper Repetitions; which, if the Offices were ſeparate, would not. However, as it is, they, who uſe extempore Prayers in public, have ſmall Right to reproach us on this Head. For doth it not frequently happen, that, during one Aſſembly of theirs, different

ferent Miniſters praying ſucceſſively, or the ſame Miniſter in ſeveral Prayers, or perhaps in one only, ſhall fall into as many Repetitions, as are in the different Parts of our Liturgy, or more? But be that as it will, to theſe laſt all Perſons would eaſily be reconciled, if an Interval were placed, in their Minds at leaſt, between the Services; and they would conſider each, when it begins, as a new and independent one, juſt as if it were a freſh Time of meeting together.

The Litany of our Church is not quite the ſame with any other: but differs very little from thoſe of the Lutherans in *Germany* and *Denmark*. It is larger than the *Greek*; but ſhorter than the *Roman*, which is half filled up with the Names of Saints invoked: whereas we invoke, firſt the three Perſons of the holy Trinity, ſeparately and jointly; then in a more particular Manner our Redeemer and Mediator, *to whom all Power is given in Heaven and Earth* [1].

Him we pray, that he would *not remember our Offences, nor the Offences of our Forefathers:* which he may not only with Juſtice permit to intercept from us (as they naturally

[1] Matt. xxviii. 18.

often

often will) the Bleſſings, that we might elſe have inherited; but, if we have imitated wicked Anceſtors, inſtead of taking Warning by them, he may with equal Juſtice puniſh us more ſeverely, not indeed than we deſerve, but than he would have done otherwiſe, to prevent the Contagion from growing general and inveterate. Accordingly the ſecond Commandment threatens to *viſit the Iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children:* and the Pſalmiſt, according to the Marginal, and perhaps righter Tranſlation, prays as we do: *O remember not againſt us the Iniquities of them, that were before us* [m].

The Words, *and be not angry with us for ever*, beg, that the Corrections, which he doth ſee fit to inflict on us, (for ſurely we all feel ſome) he would in Mercy ſhorten. It is common Language to ſpeak of Afflictions, that laſt any Time, as if they were endleſs. And the Expoſtulation of *David* in the juſt quoted Pſalm, *How long, O Lord? wilt thou be angry for ever* [n]? fully vindicates this Petition, which was doubtleſs taken from thence.

Having, after this, beſought our bleſſed Lord to deliver us *from all Evil and Miſchief* in general, that is, from every Thing bad and hurt-

[m] Pſ. lxxix. 8. [n] Ver. 5.

ful

ful to us: we deſervedly rank *Sin* the foremoſt of ſuch Things; and pray, firſt againſt the original Cauſe of human Wickedneſs, *the* ſecret *Crafts and* open *Aſſaults of the Devil,* and its dreadful Conſequences, *God's Wrath and everlaſting Damnation*; then againſt the principal Tranſgreſſions of his Laws by Name, ſubjoining, *and all other deadly Sin.* By this we mean not to deny, that *the* juſt *Wages* of every *Sin is Death* [o]*:* (though *there are,* as we learn from St. *John* [p]*, Sins, not unto Death,* that is comparatively) but only to pray againſt the peculiarly deadly with peculiar Earneſtneſs. But ſtill, that we may leave out none, we petition laſtly to be delivered *from all the Deceits of the World, the Fleſh and the Devil:* every Iniquity of every Kind and Degree.

Then we proceed to deprecate the preſent Sufferings, that our Sins have merited: and intreat our merciful Redeemer to preſerve us, both from ſuch, as God's immediate Hand inflicts; *Lightening and Tempeſt, Plague* properly ſo called, *Peſtilence,* or epidemic Diſeaſes of any Sort, *Famine and ſudden Death*; and from ſuch alſo, as Men's unreaſonable Paſſions produce; whether they be temporal, as *Battle and Mur-*

[o] Rom. vi. 23. [p] 1 John v. 16, 17.

der;

der; or ſpiritual, as *falſe Doctrine*, with its Fruits, *Hereſy and Schiſm*; and what begets them all, *Hardneſs of Heart* in regard to God's Commands, and *Contempt of his Word*, which Contempt was never ſo widely ſpread and infectious, as at preſent.

We have indeed been blamed for praying againſt *ſudden Death*. But the whole Chriſtian Church hath done it from ancient Time: and Nature and Reaſon, as well as Religion, direct us to do it. Some, we own, (and we wiſh they were many,) may be always prepared throughly, in all Reſpects, to die at any Time. Yet even theſe may have Cauſe to wiſh for Warning of their Death on Account of other Perſons. Their Example under the Approach of it will uſually be very inſtructive; and their dying Advice more than ordinarily beneficial to their Friends, Dependents and Relations: whom alſo their being taken away at once may ſhock, to a Degree, for which they would be extremely ſorry, whatever they might otherwiſe chuſe for themſelves. But, even on their own Account, Chriſtian Humility would ſurely deſire a little Space for completer Preparation. And they, who profeſs to wiſh the contrary, are they ſo very certain, as this implies, that

every

every Part, both of their worldly Affairs and their eternal Concerns, is in the beſt Condition, to which it can be brought? Or may not poſſibly this appearing Readineſs to die at any Time ariſe, either from a ſecret Dread to think of dying at all, or a ſecret Unbelief, more or leſs, of what will follow after Death? But whatever a few may imagine beſt for themſelves, juſtly or unjuſtly; ſome previous Notice is undeniably beſt for the Generality: and common Prayers muſt be adapted to common Caſes; always ſubmitting it to God, to make Exceptions, where he ſhall think proper.

Having thus expreſſed, from what Things we deſire to be delivered, we earneſtly intreat our good and gracious Lord to ſhew this Mercy to us, *by the Myſtery of his holy Incarnation*, and ſo on: that is, by the Means, and for the Sake, of all that he hath done and ſuffered for us. The ſame Manner of Expreſſion is uſed, not only in common Speech on other Occaſions, and in the Liturgies of the ancient Church on this, but in the Scripture itſelf: where St. Paul *beſeeches* Chriſtians *by the Mercies of God*[q], *by the Meekneſs and Gentleneſs of Chriſt*[r], *by his Coming and their Gathering together to him*[s]; and

[q] Rom. xii. 1. [r] 2 Cor. x. 1. [s] 2 Theſſ. ii. 1.

Daniel

Daniel intercedes with God thus, *According to all thy Righteouſneſs, let thine Anger be turned away: defer not for thine own Sake, O my God*[t].

As we have Need of Protection and Deliverance continually, ſo we proceed to beg for it, not only *in all Time of our Tribulation*, or Adverſity; but *in all Time of our Wealth*, or Proſperity: for when we ſeem in the moſt flouriſhing State, we are often in the moſt Danger of Evil; and of Sin, the worſt Evil. But as *the Hour of Death* is a Seaſon of peculiar Trial and Terror; *and the Day of Judgement* will determine our Lot for ever: we therefore intreat his more eſpecial Grace and Favour at both. The former indeed fixes our Condition at the latter. But ſtill, as the beſt Life and Death obtain Acquittal and Reward, only through the pardoning Goodneſs of our Judge; we have great Cauſe to pray for ourſelves, as St. *Paul* did for *Oneſiphorus, that we may find Mercy of the Lord in that Day*[u].

Having thus repreſented our own Neceſſities, we now enlarge the Subject of our Devotions; and *make Supplications*, as the Apoſtle *exhorts, for all Men*[w]: acknowledging, that we are *Sinners*, and therefore unworthy, yet ſenſible

[t] Dan. ix. 16, 19. [u] 2 Tim. i. 18. [w] 1 Tim. ii. 1.

that

that we are bound by his Commands, and encouraged by his Promiſes, to offer up ſuch Requeſts. And, here, after praying in general for the Catholic Church, we pray in particular for the Head and principal Members, both ſpiritual and temporal, of that Part of it, to which we belong, and for the whole of God's People of this Land: then we extend our Views further yet; and apply for Bleſſings, religious and civil, to all other Nations in common with our own; and to all Sorts of Perſons amongſt Them and ourſelves, according to their reſpective Diſtreſſes and Wants, of Soul, Body or outward Circumſtances: and laſtly conclude our Interceſſions with imploring God's *Mercy upon all Men*, whatever their Country, their Religion, their Sins may be; but eſpecially on *our Enemies, Perſecutors and Slanderers*, whom we beg he would *forgive*, and in order to it, *turn their Hearts* to a righter Diſpoſition.

Againſt ſome of our Requeſts for others, Objections have been made. One is, that in beſeeching God *to ſuccour, help, and comfort all that are in Danger*, we beſeech him to aſſiſt Malefactors in eſcaping Juſtice. But doth not every one underſtand it of ſuch *Help and Comfort*, as their Caſe admits, conſiſtently with common

common Good? Another is, that in praying him *to preſerve all that travel by Land or by Water*, we pray for the Preſervation of Robbers and Pirates. But ſurely our Intention is very plain: to beg, that Travellers on their lawful Occaſions may be ſecured from Robbers and Pirates, amongſt other Accidents: And if we add in our Minds a further Requeſt, that theſe Wretches alſo may be preſerved, that is, from attempting any more Injuſtice and Violence, do we not act a very Chriſtian Part? The ſame Cavil hath been raiſed againſt our praying for God's *Pity to all Priſoners* and *Mercy upon all Men*: Words, which notoriouſly mean ſuch Pity and Mercy, as he ſhall judge not to be unfit. And Writers and Speakers never ſcruple to omit Limitations, which every Reader or Hearer, who is not perverſe, will of Courſe ſupply.

After going through theſe Petitions, we endeavour to excite our Deſires of a gracious Anſwer, to as much Fervency as we can, by ſhort, but affectionate Sentences, uttered alternately, in a Sort of pious Emulation, between the Miniſter and People; and humbly importuning our Redeemer, as the eternal *Son* and ſpotleſs *Lamb of God*, the Lord's *Chriſt*, and the *Lord*

of Chriſtians, that he would *grant us* his promiſed *Peace*, which includes all Bleſſings, and *have Mercy upon us*, in beſtowing what we have aſked. For this Purpoſe, it is acknowledged, we repeat ſeveral Times the ſame Words, with very ſmall Variations. But ſuch *Repetitions*, far from *vain*[x], are moſt expreſſive ones: the natural, the almoſt conſtant Language of Earneſtneſs. Hence our Saviour, in his Agony, reiterated the ſame Words thrice[y]: and *David*, in a Tranſport of Thankſgiving, even to the ſix and twentieth Time, as you may ſee in the 136th Pſalm. And theſe very Repetitions, which we uſe, are warranted by the ancient Offices of the Chriſtian Church.

Having thus enlivened our Devotion, we proceed to offer up, what deſerves the moſt lively Efforts of it, that perfect Summary of all our Petitions, the *Lord's Prayer*: which, though it occur ſeveral Times in the ſeveral Services of the Morning, occurs but once in this; and cannot eaſily be recited too often, provided it be with Attention and Affection.

Hitherto the Litany hath dwelt on no ſingle Subject of Prayer long; but comprehended a ſurpriſing Variety of the moſt needful Articles

[x] Matt. vi. 7. [y] Matt. xxvi 44.

in

in a very narrow Compaſs. The Remainder is of a different Nature. It conſiders our State here, very juſtly, as furniſhing perpetual Ground of ſad Reflection to every thoughtful Mind: and applies itſelf wholly to expreſs to our heavenly Father the Sentiments required in ſuch a Condition. The ſeemingly happieſt Perſons in the World are very inconſiderate, if they do not diſcern a great deal to mourn over, in others and themſelves. Yet at the ſame Time, the moſt afflicted are to blame, if they ſink under, either what they ſee or feel. But the common Duty of both is, *in every Thing, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thankſgiving, to make their Requeſts known unto God* [z]. And therefore this Part of the Litany, though firſt introduced on Occaſion of extraordinary Diſtreſſes, lying heavy on *Chriſtendom* 11 or 1200 Years ago, will be too ſeaſonable in every Age, till one of truer Piety and more Tranquillity ſhall come, than hath yet been known, or is likely ſoon to take Place.

As the Tranſgreſſions, by which we offend God, are the Cauſe of our Sufferings, theſe our Supplications begin very properly, with intreating, in Scripture Words, that on humbling

[z] Phil. iv. 6.

ourſelves before him, he would *not deal with us after our Sins, neither reward us after our Iniquities*[a]. Next to this follows, as is repeated in the Sequel, an Exhortation, *Let us pray:* which may appear ſomewhat ſtrange, conſidering that Prayers immediately precede in both Places. But they are ſhort Ejaculations, not continued Forms, like thoſe which follow. And beſides, this redoubled Admonition, towards the Concluſion of the Office, will very uſefully remind thoſe, who may poſſibly be growing languid and inattentive, in how important a Work they are engaged. Something there was of this Kind, even in the Heathen Devotions. But in the old Liturgies of Chriſtian *Greece, Let us pray, Let us pray earneſtly, Let us pray more earneſtly,* often returns.

And the ſucceeding Prayer, which is of ancient Uſe in the Weſtern Church, deſerves our utmoſt Earneſtneſs. It begs of Him, who, as the Pſalmiſt aſſures us, *will not deſpiſe a broken and contrite Heart*, (which Phraſe I have already explained to you) that *in all our Troubles* he will both *aſſiſt us to make our Prayers before him* as we ought, *and graciouſly hear us:* that ſo the Deſigns of our Enemies, viſible and in-

[a] Pſ. ciii. 10.

viſible,

viſible, may be diſappointed, and we may feel and expreſs a juſt Gratitude for our Deliverance. To this the Congregation anſwer, not as uſual, *Amen:* but in a ſhort Form of Scripture Words [b], more ſtrongly expreſſive of pious Fervency. The Miniſter inſtantly returns another Scriptural Addreſs [c] to God; pleading with Him, and ſuggeſting to Us, *the noble Works*, done by him for his Church and People in general, and many good Perſons in particular, which, if we have not ſeen with our Eyes, *we have heard with our Ears:* holy Writ and other Hiſtory hath related them; or *our Fathers have declared them to us*, partly as performed *in their Days*, partly *in the old Time before them.* And ſince *his Arm is not ſhortened, that it cannot ſave; nor his Ear become heavy, that it cannot hear* [d]; the Congregation again petition him, in the ſame Words, as before; (only changing one for another, ſtill more pathetic;) that he would *ariſe, help and deliver them* for the *Honour* of *his Name:* not for our Merits, but his own glorious Perfections, and the Inſtruction of his Creatures; that we and all Men may learn to love and praiſe and ſerve him. Yet to this we are indiſpenſably bound, even

[b] Numb. x. 35. Pſ. lxxix. 9. [c] Pſ. xliv. 1. [d] Iſ. lix. 1.

while the painfulleſt View of our Sorrows and Wants is before our Eyes: and therefore in the Midſt of our Supplications we proceed immediately to aſcribe that Glory to the ſacred Three, which ever hath been, is, and will be, their Due; whether infinite Wiſdom allots to Us Proſperity or Adverſity. Nor is the Mixture of Doxologies with Complaints leſs common in Acts of Worſhip, than it is reaſonable. The Book of *Pſalms* uſes it frequently: the old *Latin* and *Greek* Liturgies uſe it on this very Occaſion: and ſurely in our private Devotions, even when moſt afflicted, we ſtill give Praiſe to God.

But though we own it our Duty to glorify him in the ſevereſt Sufferings, if it be his Will that we ſhould undergo them: yet conſcious of our Weakneſs, we go on to beg his Protection againſt them, or Deliverance of us from them, in mutual Ejaculations of the utmoſt Warmth: not that moving Expreſſions will any otherwiſe incline Him to grant Mercy, than as they fit Us to receive it, by imprinting on us a juſt Senſe of our Dependance; which, if uſed with Sincerity, they naturally do.

Then we cloſe this Part of the Litany with a more continued Form of Addreſs to our merciful *Father*; compoſed originally above 1100 Years

Years ago; corrupted indeed afterwards, by intreating God to *turn from us* all *Evils* for the Sake of the Interceſſion of his Saints; but reformed in our Liturgy, not only by leaving out that Addition, but by inſerting for completer Security a new Clauſe: *Grant, that in all our Troubles we may put our whole Truſt and Confidence in thy Mercy.* And thus it is, that we borrow from the Church of *Rome.* By this Prayer, ſo amended, we humbly confeſs our Infirmities and Unworthineſs: yet beg, that notwithſtanding both, we may, if God ſees it proper, eſcape the Afflictions, which we fear: but if not, that being ſtill aſſured of his Goodneſs to us, we may, with *Job, though he ſlay us, truſt in him*[e]: and that for Proof of this, we may as faithfully do our Duty under the heavieſt Preſſures, as the higheſt Exaltation; *and evermore ſerve him in Holineſs and Pureneſs of Living, to his Honour and Glory*; ſaying with *Job* again, *ſhall we receive Good at the Hand of God, and ſhall we not receive Evil*[f]*? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: bleſſed be the Name of the Lord*[g].

What remains of the Litany is the ſame with the Concluſion of the Morning and Evening

[e] Job xiii. 15. [f] Job ii. 10. [g] Job i. 21.

Prayer: and therefore needs no ſeparate Explanation. May God give us Grace to uſe theſe and all our Devotions in ſo right a Manner, that from praying to him amidſt the Troubles and Sorrows of this World, we may be taken, in his good Time, to praiſe him for ever amidſt the Joys of the next, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SER-

SERMON XI.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

—I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the Underſtanding alſo: I will ſing with the Spirit, and I will ſing with the Underſtanding alſo.

ONCE more I intreat your Attention to the Subject, on which I have ſo often diſcourſed from theſe Words. The Part of it, which remains, is the Communion Service. But as that Service is almoſt every where ſeparated, and very properly, from the preceding one, by the Singing of a Pſalm, I would firſt ſay a little concerning that much diſregarded Branch of Worſhip.

As Singing is capable of expreſſing ſtrongly every State, in which the Mind can be, towards every Object; ſo there never was perhaps any one

one Nation upon Earth, civilized or barbarous, that did not make this a Part of the Honour paid by them to the God, whom they adored. We find in the Old Teſtament, it was practiſed by the *Jews*, before their Law was given, as well as after [a]. The Book of *Pſalms* conſiſts wholly of religious Songs: and directs the *Saints of the Lord, to ſing unto him, and give Thanks for a Remembrance of his Holineſs* [b]: to *ſing unto the Honour of his Name, and make his Praiſe glorious* [c]; *to ſing Praiſes unto our God, while we have our Being* [d]. The Prophets foretell, that, in the Goſpel Times, Men *ſhall ſing for the Majeſty of the Lord:* and, which brings the Prediction home to Us, *they ſhall cry aloud, and glorify God, in the Iſles of the Sea* [e]. Accordingly St. *Paul*, not only himſelf with *Silas*, even in Priſon, *ſang Praiſes unto God* [f]; but appoints, that all Chriſtians ſhould *ſpeak to themſelves, and admoniſh one another, in Pſalms and Hymns and ſpiritual Songs, making Melody with Grace in their Hearts to the Lord* [g]. And St. *James* preſcribes, *Is any one merry?* in a joyful Frame on Account of Bleſſings received, (for the Word,

[a] Exod xv. 1, &c. [b] Pſ. xxx. 4. [c] Pſ. lxvi. 1, 2. [d] Pſ. cxlvi. 2. [e] Iſ. xxiv. 14, 15. [f] Acts xvi. 23, 24, 25. [g] Eph. v. 19. Col. iii. 16.

Mirth,

Mirth, comprehended anciently the moſt ſerious Kinds of Gladneſs) *let him ſing Pſalms* [h].

In Purſuance of theſe Rules, the firſt Chriſtians made Singing a conſtant Part of their Worſhip: as, beſides the Eccleſiaſtical Writers, even a Heathen informs us [i]. And the whole Congregation joined in it. Afterwards indeed the Singers by Profeſſion, who had been prudently appointed to lead and direct them, by Degrees uſurped the whole Performance [k]. But at the Reformation the People were reſtored to their Rights: and it made a much quicker Progreſs for the Pleaſure and Comfort, which they found in this Practice: a Circumſtance, that ought to endear it to conſiderate Perſons not a little. And as the only Way of ſinging known in commmon parochial Churches is by the Metre Pſalms; unleſs we join in that, we intirely omit this Branch of our Duty.

It is very true, the Verſe Tranſlation of the Pſalms, generally uſed, is void of Ornament: and hath Expreſſions, often low and flat, ſometimes obſolete. And I wiſh a better were ſubſtituted in its Place. But ſtill in many other Caſes, ancient ſolemn Forms of Words are

[h] James v. 13. [i] Plin. l. x, Ep. 97. [k] *Bingham* iii, 7, 2.

thought venerable, when they are far from elegant: not to ſay, that the Language of our Forefathers, even where it may ſeem very uncouth at preſent, had in its Time frequently full as much Propriety and Beauty, as ours. And ſeveral Words of it have been, for that Reaſon, revived by ſome of our beſt modern Authors. But at leaſt the Matter, compriſed in the Words, of which I am ſpeaking, is ſo highly reſpectable, that the Mind, which is affected only by the Phraſe, and not by the Senſe, muſt be a light one indeed.

Again, it is true alſo, that the Tunes, to which theſe Pſalms are ſung, are moſt of them plain and ſlow; and the Voices of many in the Aſſembly unharmonious, and apt to be ill-managed. But Tunes, deſigned for the Multitude to join in, who have never been regularly inſtructed, muſt be plain and ſlow, and ſuch as they have been accuſtomed to: for which Purpoſe the Number ſhould be moderate. Ours are many of them recommended, and as it were conſecrated, by long Uſage. Confeſſors for the Proteſtant Cauſe have compoſed them. Martyrs for it have yielded up their dying Breath in them. And ſeveral of them are thought, by competent Judges, no Way deficient in real Melody.

Melody. Amongſt a Variety of People, Part of them with bad Ears, and moſt of them with untaught Voices, there will be ſome, that had better totally abſtain; only attending to the Senſe, as well as the Sound, of what is uttered by the reſt: and others, that ſhould moderate themſelves to a prudent Degree of Lowneſs, till they have learnt, how to exert themſelves more properly. But all who are, or can be qualified, and there are few who cannot, ſhould bear ſuch a Part as they are able. It may be done, without in the leaſt diſordering the more ſkilful Singers, who perform the very uſeful Office of raiſing and ſupporting the Tune. This in many Congregations is done by the Organ, the Charity Children, or both. But then the Organ ſhould expreſs the Tunes plainly and diſtinctly, and make very moderate Intervals between the Lines; the Children ſhould be taught to ſing in exact Time and Concert with it; and the whole Congregation ſhould accompany them fervently, yet with Prudence. Taking this Care, though there ſhould ſtill happen to be ſome little Diſcords, they would be intirely loſt in the general Chorus: the Effect of which would be noble and elevating, if we took rightly into our Thoughts the whole of the

the Matter, inſtead of cavilling at minute Particulars.

Conſider the Nature of a wild Multitude, in its original ſavage State, met together at the Call of ſome vehement ungoverned Paſſion: how alarming the Concourſe, how frightful and horrid the confuſed and hideous Cries of it muſt be. Then conſider the ſame Multitude, ſoftened and cultivated by the gentle Influences of Religion, and unanimouſly aſſembling at ſtated Seaſons, to ſing forth the Praiſes of the wiſe and good Parent of all, and echo to each other the Precepts of a rational and mild and beneficent Life here, as the Means of obtaining eternal Felicity hereafter. Can there be a happier Change of Scene, a ſweeter and more pleaſing View? And ſuppoſe the Harmony made by them were ever ſo little better, than *ſhouting unto God with the Voice of Triumph*, as the Scripture expreſſes it, and *making a joyful Noiſe unto the Rock of their Salvation*[1]: yet what worthy and humane and pious Heart is there, that would not be charmed with the Sound, and zealouſly join in it? We are diſpoſed thus on other Occaſions. Amongſt our Anceſtors, who judged of Propriety as diſcreetly as our-

[1] Pſ. xlvii. 1. xcv. 1.

ſelves,

ſelves, (to ſay no more) the very higheſt joined humbly and cheerfully with the loweſt of their Fellow Chriſtians in the Duty of Pſalmody, however artleſsly performed. And I intreat you to reflect what it is, either to diſdain, or be aſhamed, or be too indolent, to lift up our Voices to the Honour of our Maker, when we come into his Houſe profeſſedly to worſhip him, and he hath commanded that one Part of his Worſhip ſhall be this.

But if we will not employ our Lips in the Service, we may ſtill fix our Minds upon it: at leaſt, we ſhould not hinder others from doing either. And particularly we ſhould abſtain from giving the bad Example, and the Offence, of indecently holding Converſation at that Time: for which there cannot ſurely be ſo preſſing an Occaſion, but that it may very ſafely be deferred till after Church, if not altogether omitted.

In the ſinging of Pſalms, different Perſons uſe different Poſtures. The Proſe Pſalms, I believe, are and ever have been repeated by all Perſons every where, ſtanding. In the Verſe Pſalms we all ſtand at the Doxology. And in what goes before, the Reaſon for doing it is exactly the ſame, and a very ſtrong one: that the whole is ſung to the Glory of God, and often

ten directly addreſſed to God. Accordingly we read in the Old Teſtament, that not only the *Levites* were *to ſtand every Morning to thank and praiſe the Lord, and likewiſe at Even* [m], but that when *they waited with Inſtruments of Muſic to praiſe the Lord, all Iſrael ſtood* [n]; and again, that they ſaid to the People, *ſtand up, and bleſs the Lord your God* [o]. We read likewiſe, that in a Viſion of St. *John*, in the Book of *Revelation, a great Multitude, which no Man could number, ſtood before the Throne, and cried with a loud Voice, Salvation to our God* [p]: and in another, that *they who had gotten the Victory over the Beaſt, ſtood and ſang the Song of Moſes, and of the Lamb* [q]. Standing therefore, as it is plainly the fitteſt Poſture in itſelf, is the authorized one alſo: and were it more uncommon than it is, would be far from a diſhonourable Singularity. But ſtill, as very many in moſt Congregations, either have by long Habit been prejudiced in Favour of ſitting, or, though they diſapprove the Cuſtom, feel a Difficulty of quitting it, unleſs every one did: they ſhould not be cenſured for a Practice by which they mean nothing amiſs; but kindly encouraged to an

[m] 1 Chron. xxiii. 30. [n] 2 Chron. vii. 6. [o] Neh. ix. 5.
[p] Rev. vii. 9, 10. [q] Rev. xv. 2, 3.

Alte-

Alteration in this Point, which we may thus hope will gradually become general.

And now I go on to the third Morning Office, which follows the Pſalm; and is called the *Communion-Service*, and read at the Lord's Table where it can with Convenience, becauſe the holy Communion makes Part of it: though a Part unhappily, now for many Centuries, too often left out in almoſt all Churches, which it never was originally in any. But however the reſt is very proper to be uſed by itſelf. Anciently, as well as now, they, who did not ſtay to receive the Sacrament, were allowed to join in the Beginning of the Office: and from the middle Ages downwards, the Beginning hath been uſed, even where there was no Sacrament, for a Memorial, which might be uſeful, of the primitive Practice.

The firſt Thing we do in it, is repeating the Lord's Prayer: which peculiarly ſuits this moſt ſolemn Act of Chriſtian Worſhip. Then we proceed, in a very old and excellent Collect, to beg of Him, *unto whom all Hearts be open, ſo to cleanſe the Thoughts of ours, by the Inſpiration of his holy Spirit*, by breathing into us with laſting Efficacy good Inclinations and Purpoſes, *that we may*, as *perfectly* as our preſent State admits,

admits, *love* him in our Souls, and *magnify* him in our Words and Lives. Purity of Intention is both in general requiſite for approaching God's Altar, and more eſpecially for going through the next Part of the Office aright: in which, after hearing the Ten Commandments rehearſed to us, we pray God to *have Mercy upon us*, and pardon us, ſo far as we have tranſgreſſed either the Letter or the Spirit of them, as explained by our bleſſed Redeemer, *and incline our Hearts to keep* each of them better for the future. It doth not appear, that this Form of Devotion was ever uſed in any Liturgy, before our own. But ſurely, taking the Commandments with the Goſpel Interpretation of them, it is a very inſtructive and edifying one. And they, who think the Confeſſion in the Morning Prayer not particular enough, have ſufficient Room here to ſupply that imagined Defect.

Next follows a Prayer for the King. The primitive Chriſtians, in every public Office, preſented a Supplication for their Sovereign. Now in this Office, unleſs it were put in the Beginning, few in Proportion would join in it when the Sacrament is adminiſtered, conſidering how many return Home without receiving.

And

And therefore it is placed here, juſt after the Ten Commandments, of which the Authority of the Magiſtrate is one main Support, as they are of that in return: and we pray the Almighty, that, in *Mercy to his Church, he will ſo rule the King's Heart*, whom in the Courſe of his Providence he hath *choſen* to reign over us, and to be his *Servant* and *Miniſter to us for Good* [s], *that he may above all Things ſeek his Glory*, by maintaining his Laws above-mentioned: and will ſo *rule* our *Hearts* likewiſe, and thoſe of *all his Subjects, that we may faithfully and humbly obey him: in God*, that is, in the Strength of his Grace, and in Subordination, not Contradiction to his ſupreme Will; and *for God*, not only *for* Fear of Man's *Wrath, but for Conſcience Sake alſo* [t].

Then we offer up the Collect for the Day, of which I have ſpoken already: and after it, read two Portions of Scripture, to which it hath frequently a Reference. One of them is uſually taken from the Epiſtles, the other always from the Goſpels. The Epiſtle hath been thus read, certainly for 1300 Years, but the Goſpel much longer. And the very Portions, that we now uſe, were moſt of them uſed on the ſame Days

[s] Rom. xiii. 4. [t] Ver. 5.

1200 Years ago, and perhaps a great deal earlier. The annual Courſe of them, and of the Collects prefixed to them, began then, as it doth now, not with the Civil Year, or the Entrance of the Sun into this or that Sign; but from the *Advent*, the Approach of the Appearance of Chriſt, *the Sun of Righteouſneſs* [u]. And it was ſo contrived, that the former Part, from his Birth to his Aſcenſion, ſhould repreſent to us the principal Articles of his Hiſtory: the latter, thoſe of our own Duty.

At the reading of the Goſpel, the People are directed to ſtand up, in Honour of Him, whoſe Life and Words it relates. And there appears no Time, when they did otherwiſe: or when that Acclamation, *Glory be to thee, O Lord,* was not made, which indeed at preſent is not preſcribed, though it was in the firſt Edition of *Edward* the Sixth's Liturgy, but omitted afterwards, probably by Accident: for there could be no Objection raiſed againſt it.

As in the Morning Prayer, ſo in the Communion Service, for the ſame Reaſon, after reading the Scripture, we recite the Creed: only there we have that of the ancient *Latin* Church, here that of the ancient *Greek*; made

[u] Mal. iv. 2.

in

in the firſt General Council, held at *Nice*, above 1400 Years ago, and thence called *Nicene*; excepting, that ſome ſmall Additions were inſerted ſince; all of them, but one [w], about 50 Years after.

In this Creed, we profeſs ourſelves *to believe in one Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, becauſe ſome had ſpoken of the human and divine Nature of our Saviour, which they called Jeſus and Chriſt, as two Perſons not united. The Words, *Light of Light*, intimating, that his divine Nature is from the Father, as Light is from the Sun, or as one Light without Diminution of itſelf kindles another, were intended for ſome imperfect Illuſtration, (and doubtleſs a very imperfect one it is, and any other muſt be,) of his myſterious Generation. The Words, *Lord, and Giver of Life*, aſcribed to the Spirit, are not to be joined, as one ſingle Attribute; but are taken from two different Texts of Scripture: in the one of which he is called, according to the marginal Reading, *the Lord the Spirit* [x]; and ſaid in the other *to give Life* [y], that is, the ſpiritual Life of Grace. The Phraſe, *who pro-*

[w] Conſiſting of the Words, *and the Son:* which came in ſome hundreds of Years after. See *Nichols.* [x] 2 Cor. iii. 18. [y] Ver. 6.

ceedeth from the Father and the Son, may ſignify, either his deriving from the latter, as well as the former, his eternal Subſiſtence; or, ſince that hath been diſputed between the *Latin* and *Greek* Church, his being ſent by both into the Hearts of Men, as the Scripture plainly affirms he is [z].

After the Creed another Pſalm is ſung: and then the Miniſter, who is to preach, *moves the People,* by the Direction of the 55th Canon, *to join with him in* a ſhort Form of *Prayer.* This was more particularly needful in paſt Ages, when the Sermons were commonly at a different Hour from the Liturgy, as they are ſtill at our Univerſities. And at whatever Hour they were, great Streſs was laid on the Uſe of this Prayer, for ſome Time after the Reformation; becauſe, when that took Place, an Acknowledgement of the King's Supremacy, which the *Papiſts* denied, was very prudently, as Things then ſtood, inſerted into it. And hence it hath continued to our Days, though it is frequently ſhortened into a Collect and the Lord's Prayer, the Reaſon for enlarging being now become leſs. The original Manner of performing this Part of the Preacher's Office was by *bidding,*

[z] John xiv. 26. xv. 26. xvi. 7.

that

that is, inviting and exhorting, the People to pray for the ſeveral Particulars, mentioned by him: which they were underſtood to do, either ſilently in their Minds, as they went along with him, or by comprehending them all in the Lord's Prayer at laſt. But in Proceſs of Time, ſome imagined it better to put the whole into the Shape of a direct Addreſs: others followed their Example, as thinking it a Matter of Indifference: but moſt have kept to the old Way. And the Intention being the ſame, neither Cuſtom ſhould give Offence.

The Sermon was anciently an Explanation and Improvement of the Epiſtle and Goſpel, juſt read before, eſpecially the latter. But now for a long Time a greater Latitude hath been uſefully taken.

After the Sermon, one or more of the *Sentences*, or Scripture Injunctions of Bounty and Almſgiving, as alſo the *Prayer for the whole State of Chriſt's Church*, are appointed to be read, *if there be no Communion*, before the Congregation be diſmiſſed: neither of theſe Things being ever unſuitable. And *the firſt Day of the Week* is recommended in Scripture for Purpoſes of Charity [a], as well as ſet apart for *making*

[a] 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

Supplications and giving Thanks for all Men [b]. But they are both more peculiarly proper with a View to the Communion: in which Light I ſhall now conſider them.

When we commemorate our Saviour's dying Love to us all, we ought ſurely to think of expreſſing our Love to our Brethren: which muſt be ſhewn by promoting both their ſpiritual Good and their temporal. To the former belong thoſe Sentences, which require, that they who are able, ſhould contribute to the Maintenance of a Goſpel Miniſtry, where it wants their Help. And they require it ſtrongly, as you will perceive by reading them. For indeed we ſeldom or never read them to you, that we may not ſeem to plead our own Cauſe: excepting in ſome few of our Churches, where the primitive Practice, (needful in too many more) of giving Oblations to the Miniſter, as well as Alms to the poor, at the Sacrament, is preſerved or reſtored. The reſt of the Sentences exhort to the latter Duty of relieving the Sick and Needy. What is generally given for them on this Occaſion muſt be conſidered not as the whole, but a Sample and Earneſt of your Charity; I hope, a ſmall one, in Compariſon of

[b] 1 Tim. ii. 1.

what

what you give at other Times, and, I truſt, is every where faithfully applied as it ought, with moſt religious and prudent Care.

But as there are few in Proportion, to whom we can do Good with our Subſtance; and many, that are much above our Alms, yet greatly need our Prayers: we proceed to offer them up *for the whole State of Chriſt's Church, militant,* that is, carrying on a Warfare againſt the Enemies of the Soul, *here on Earth:* that all the Members of it may not only have *the Spirit,* the fervent Deſire, *of Truth, Unity and Concord,* but may actually *agree in the Truth of God's holy Word, and live in Unity and godly Love.* Then we petition more eſpecially for thoſe, whoſe Stations, as Kings, Magiſtrates and Clergy, or whoſe Sufferings of any Kind, require it moſt: and give Thanks for thoſe, who are got beyond the Reach of Sufferings; begging, that we may *follow their Example,* as far as it was a *good* one, and ſhare in their Happineſs.

The two *Exhortations,* ordered to be uſed, one or other of them, *when Warning of the Communion is* given, are ſeldom uſed, where it returns too frequently and ſtatedly to need Warning. However, they have a great deal in them, that ought to be ſeriouſly weighed; but nothing,

that

that wants to be explained at preſent: unleſs it be the Direction laid down, that they, who *cannot quiet their own Conſciences*, as to their ſpiritual State, and Fitneſs for the Sacrament, ſhould *open their Grief to ſome diſcreet and learned Miniſter of God's Word, that they may receive the Benefit of Abſolution*, if they appear intitled to it, *together with ghoſtly*, that is, ſpiritual, *Counſel*. Now here, you ſee, this private Abſolution is not affirmed to be, as it is by the Papiſts, neceſſary for all Perſons; but only adviſeable for ſome. It therefore is only a Declaration of the Miniſter's Judgement, a fallible one indeed, but the proper and appointed one, that if the Perſon's Caſe be truly repreſented, he is pardoned and abſolved by our heavenly Father, who alone can forgive Sins. And ſuch Credit only is due to this Declaration, as in other Affairs we allow to authorized Profeſſors and Practitioners of Skill and Probity: whoſe Opinions we often think it prudent to aſk, and happy to have in our Favour: and God forbid, that we ſhould not give you ours, when we are aſked it, with as much Fidelity and as much Secrecy, as any Miniſters of any Church whatever!

There

There is the leſs Occaſion that I ſhould enlarge on this Office, becauſe I have explained in my Lectures on the Church Catechiſm, the principal Points, relating to the Lord's Supper. I have ſhewn you in particular, that the Expreſſion of *eating and drinking Damnation to ourſelves*, (which is uſed by St. *Paul* in his firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians* [c], and from thence taken into the Exhortation at the Communion) means only bringing upon ourſelves a Condemnation to ſome Puniſhment from God, without determining of what Kind. For the Verſes immediately following, (which I ſhall preſently repeat to you) very clearly ſhow that the Word in the Original, which is here tranſlated *Damnation*, ought to have been rendered in this Place, as it is in ſeveral others, *Judgement*. Now *Judgement* is a general Term that ſignifies any Degree of Correction or Puniſhment in this Life, or the next. That which had been incurred by thoſe unworthy Receivers to whom the Apoſtle wrote was only Correction in the preſent Life. For undoubtedly he told them the worſt of their Danger, and he tells them of nothing elſe. The very next Words are: *For this Cauſe many any weak and ſickly among you,*

[c] Ch. xi. 29.

and

and many ſleep, are dead. Then follows, what entirely clears up the Matter: *If we would judge ourſelves we ſhould not be judged. But when we are judged we are chaſtened of the Lord, that we ſhould not be condemned with the World.* The Puniſhment, therefore of receiving unworthily will either be extended to another World or confined to this according to the Degree of the Fault: and if we repent ſincerely and in Time, it will be forgiven in both. When in the ſame Exhortation we are required to *judge ourſelves* THEN, this by no Means implies, that we need not do it before, but that we ſhould take Care it be now perfected. And when it is ſaid, that we *muſt above all Things give Thanks to God*, the Meaning is not, that Faith and Repentance are leſs neceſſary: but that theſe being ſuppoſed to precede, the principal Point in the Act of communicating is a thankful Remembrance of God's Mercy, diſpoſing us to lay hold of it.

Form this laſt Exhortation we proceed immediately to the firſt Thing recommended in it, a penitent Confeſſion of our Sins: which the ancient Church made alſo on the ſame Occaſion. When in this we ſay, that *the Burthen of them is intolerable*, we mean not always,

that the Sorrow, which we that Inſtant feel for them, is extreme: for though very ſincere, it may be imperfect in its Degree; or though as perfect, as the natural Conſtitution of our Mind and Body admits, it may not be very paſſionate and afflicting; or though it were once ſo, it may now be moderated by a joyful Senſe of God's Mercy to us: but we mean, that the Weight, with which our Guilt, if not removed, will finally ſit heavy on our Souls, is unſpeakably greater, than we ſhall be able to bear.

After this Confeſſion, the Miniſter, himſelf one of the Sinners, who hath joined in it, agreeably to the Duty of his Office, aſſures the People, that *God hath promiſed Forgiveneſs to all, that turn to him* as they ought; and earneſtly prays, that they may obtain it: adding expreſs Authorities of Scripture to confirm their Faith and Hope.

Then he exhorts them, thus comforted, to *lift up their Hearts*, and *give Thanks to God:* which Words, with the Anſwers, and the Subſtance of all that follows conſtantly, as far as, *Glory be to thee, O Lord moſt high*, appear to have been uſed in the Communion Service 1500 Years ago: and might probably deſcend from the Apoſtolic Times. Even the Cuſtom of appro-

appropriating particular Prefaces to the more conſiderable Feſtivals, is 1200 Years old, if not more.

And now, approaching nearer to the Act of receiving, we again ſolemnly acknowledge our own Unworthineſs, as all the old Liturgies did, though not ſo fully: and pray, *that our ſinful Bodies may be made clean by Chriſt's Body, and our Souls waſhed through his moſt precious Blood:* which Expreſſions have been cenſured, as if they implied, that each of theſe, at leaſt the latter of them, (his Blood) had ſome peculiar Efficacy, of which the other was deſtitute. But this cannot be intended: becauſe very ſoon after, the *Preſervation of our Bodies and Souls* alſo *unto everlaſting Life*, is aſcribed ſeparately, both to his Body and to his Blood, as it is in Scripture alſo [d]. Therefore the Diſtinction made here, was only meant for ſome Kind of Elegance in Speech: and it much reſembles what St. *Clement* the *Roman*, whom St. *Paul* intitles *his Fellow-Labourer* [e], hath ſaid in his Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, that Chriſt *gave his Fleſh for our Fleſh, and his Soul for our Souls* [f].

After this follows the Prayer of Conſecration, or ſetting apart the Bread and Wine to the ſa-

[d] Heb. x. 10, 19. [e] Phil. iv. 3. [f] Sect. 49.

cred Purpoſe, in wich they are about to be employed. A Prayer hath been uſed for that End, at leaſt 1600 Years. And the Mention, which Ours makes of the Inſtitution of the Lord's Supper, from the Words, *who in the ſame Night that he was betrayed,* to the Concluſion, is in every old Liturgy in the World. The *Romaniſts* have put into their Prayer of Conſecration, Names of Saints, and Commemorations of the Dead, which we have thrown out. And indeed we have left nothing, that ſo much as needs explaining: unleſs it may be uſeful to obſerve to you, that our Saviour's *one Oblation of himſelf* is oppoſed to the various Kinds of Oblations under the Law; and, *once offered,* to the continual Repetition of them: though probably a further View was, to intimate, that he is not, as the Papiſts pretend, really ſacrificed anew in this holy Ordinance.

The firſt Part of the Words, which the Miniſter ſpeaks at delivering the Elements, is very ancient: the reſt is added by our Church; and the whole is unexceptionable. The Poſture of kneeling, which we uſe, when we receive, is a very proper one. Some indeed think, that the Apoſtles received in the Poſture which they uſed

uſed at Meals, and that we ought to imitate them in this. Now if ſo; to imitate them ſtrictly, we muſt not ſit, (as theſe Perſons do) but lie all along: for ſo did the Apoſtles at Table. But indeed we may rather ſuppoſe, that when our Saviour bleſſed the Bread and Wine, this being an Addreſs to God, both He and they were in ſome Poſture of Adoration: and that they changed it before receiving, is not likely, conſidering how different that was from a common Meal. Nor does it appear, that any Part of the Chriſtian Church till of late Years, ever uſed any other Poſture than that of kneeling or ſtanding; by each of which they meant to ſignify Worſhip. We uſe the former: but with an expreſs Declaration inſerted in all our Prayer Books, that *no Adoration is hereby intended or ought to be done, either to the ſacramental Bread and Wine; (for that were Idolatry to be abhorred of all Chriſtians) or to any corporal Preſence of Chriſt's natural Fleſh and Blood: for they are in Heaven and not here*[s]. We kneel therefore only to adore the inviſible God: and to be in a fit Poſture for thoſe Prayers and Praiſes which can never be more properly offered up to him. And why any Per-

[s] Rubric after Communion.

ſons

ſons ſhould prefer a different Poſture we cannot ſee.

Having communicated, we again repeat, after a long Interval, the Lord's Prayer. For ſince, *to as many, as* truly *receive him, he gives Power to become the Sons of God* [h]; we may hope we have now ſtrengthened our Title to apply, under that Name, to *Our Father, which is in Heaven, &c.*

Then we *intirely*, that is, with our whole Hearts, *deſire* him, *to accept this our Sacrifice*, or Service, *of Praiſe and Thankſgiving*, which we have offered up to him: begging Leave at the ſame Time to *offer up ourſelves, Body and Soul*, as dedicated to His Will: which is the great End of all our Devotions; yet never mentioned in the *Romiſh* Maſs-Book. We pray alſo once more for the whole Church: and laſtly for our Fellow-Communicants, as well as ourſelves, that we may be *fulfilled*, that is, filled full, and as the Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, *abundantly ſatisfied* [i], *with God's Grace and Benediction.*

After this, as our bleſſed Lord ſung an Hymn [k] with his Diſciples after the Paſſover, (in Imitation of whom the whole Chriſtian

[h] John i. 12. [i] Pſ. xxxvi. 8. [k] Matt. xxvi. 30.

Church hath uſed one in commemorating *Our Paſſover, ſacrificed for us*[l],) we uſe one likewiſe, as ancient, in Subſtance, as the fourth Century at leaſt. It were better indeed, that we ſung it: if there did not, alas, often want Numbers, and generally Skill. The Beginning of it is the Song of the holy Angels in St. *Luke:* on which Foundation we proceed to *glorify* God, and *give Thanks to him for his great Glory*; meaning, that of his Goodneſs, Wiſdom and Power, diſplayed in the Work of our Redemption: fervently beſeeching *the Son and Lamb of God*, that his Sufferings to *take away the Sins of the World*, and his *ſitting at the right Hand of the Majeſty on high*[m], may bring down *Mercy upon us:* and acknowledging, that we are all impure, *He only is Holy*; Men and Angels are Servants, *He only is the Lord*; *He only with the Holy Ghoſt*, united to the *Father in Glory* unſpeakable, is *moſt High* above all.

To this Act of Worſhip we ſubjoin, (drawing now to a Concluſion,) one or more of thoſe brief, but comprehenſive Collects, which are provided for that Purpoſe. In the firſt of them,

[l] 1 Cor. v. 7. [m] Heb. i. 3.

ſome

ſome have objected againſt the Phraſe, *Chances of this mortal Life*, as implying ſomewhat irreligious. But our Saviour hath not ſcrupled to ſay, *And by Chance there came down a certain Prieſt* [n]. Again in the fourth, which is alſo frequently uſed before Sermon, ſome have ſtumbled at the Expreſſion, *Prevent us, O Lord, in all our Doings:* becauſe preventing moſt commonly ſignifies hindering. But the original Meaning, and the true one here is, Go before us: which may indeed be either to further us by opening the Way, or to obſtruct us by ſtopping it. But ſurely it can no more be doubted, which we intend, than what *David* intended, when he ſaid, *Thou ſhalt prevent him with the Bleſſings of Goodneſs* [o], and again, *The God of my Mercy ſhall prevent me* [p]. The others, I think, have no Difficulties.

What remains is the ſolemn and affectionate Form of Diſmiſſion: moſt of which is taken from the Words of holy Writ. The Miniſter of Chriſt in pronouncing it, prays, that *the Peace of God, which paſſeth all Underſtanding*, that inward Senſe of our Maker's Goodneſs to us, which even now is delightful, beyond the Conception of thoſe, who have not experienced

[n] Luke x. 31. [o] Pſ. xxi. 3. [p] Pſ. lix. 10.

it; and ſhall hereafter be ſo heightened, as vaſtly to exceed the preſent Conceptions of the beſt of us; may *keep our Hearts and Minds* [q], our Judgements and Affections, *in the Knowledge and Love of God and his Chriſt:* and that every *Bleſſing* of the holy Trinity may be diſtributed *amongſt us, and remain with us always.* Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the Sake, *&c.*

[q] Phil. iv. 7.

SER-

SERMON XII.

1 PET. v. 12.

——*Exhorting and teſtifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.*

THE Happineſs of all Creatures depends intirely on their Obedience to his Will whoſe ſovereign Power created and rules the World. Now the Will of God is made known to us in Part by natural Reaſon: and they who have no other Law ſhall be judged by that alone. But as Reaſon was unable to teach Mankind a great Number of Things very important to be known, and in Fact, did teach moſt of them but a ſmall Part of what it might have done; God was mercifully pleaſed to ſuperadd the Light of Revelation to it, and place us under the Conduct of both jointly. Such

an additional Proviſion, it might have been hoped, had cleared up all Doubts; but partly the Weakneſs, partly the Wickedneſs of Men, hath turned even this Light into Darkneſs, and made it multiply Diſputes inſtead of ending them. Still we have no Reaſon to be diſcouraged; for every upright and conſiderate Perſon may after all, with due Care, very eaſily ſee his Way before him, clearly enough to walk in in it. But we have great Reaſon to uſe this Care, and make ſuch Enquiry amidſt the different Paths, which different Perſons point out to us, as will give us Cauſe to be ſatisfied we chuſe the right. Now of all the different Opinions which have riſen concerning the Chriſtian Religion, there have been few ſo remarkable as that which divides this Part of the World into *Popiſh* and *Proteſtant*. Thoſe of the former Communion, it ſeems, think us of the latter quite out of the Way to Salvation, and accordingly are unwearied in perſuading, as they have Opportunity, the Members of our Church, eſpecially the lower and more ignorant Part of them, to quit it for theirs. The Neceſſity of doing this, they inſiſt upon ſome Times with ſo much Plauſibility, and always with ſo much Confidence, that I hope you will not think a few

few Diſcourſes ill employed on a Subject of ſuch very great Importance both to our private Satisfaction and public Security, in refuting the Arguments they uſually bring againſt us, and *teſtifying that this is the true Grace of God, wherein ye ſtand.* To proceed regularly in this Matter, I ſhall

I. Enquire what is the Rule of Chriſtian Faith and Life: and

II. Examine by this Rule the peculiar Doctrines and Practices of the *Romiſh* Church.

I. I ſhall enquire what is the Rule of Chriſtian Faith and Life: from whence we are to learn what Things our Religion requires as neceſſary, and what it forbids as unlawful: for, if we do the one and avoid the other, we are undoubtedly ſafe. Now as Jeſus Chriſt is the ſole *Author of our Faith* [a], thoſe Things, and thoſe alone, which he taught himſelf, and commiſſioned his Diſciples to teach, are Parts of our Faith. What his Doctrine was we find in no leſs than four Accounts of his Life and Preaching given in the Goſpels. To what Belief his Diſciples converted Men, we find in the Acts. What they taught Men after their Converſion, we read in the Epiſtles. Theſe ſeveral

[a] Heb. xii. 2.

Books, which make up the New Teſtament, all Chriſtians allow to contain an original and undoubtedly true Account of our Religion. The only poſſible Queſtion is, whether they contain a full and clear Account. Now ſuch a one they without Queſtion intended to give, for what could induce them deſignedly to give any other? Beſides, St. *Luke*, in the very Beginning of his Goſpel, tells us, that *having a perfect Underſtanding of thoſe Things which were believed amongſt Chriſtians, he had taken in Hand to ſet forth a Declaration of them*, that thoſe he wrote to *might know the Certainty of what they had been inſtructed in*. And St. *John*, in the Concluſion of his, tells us, that though our Saviour *did*, and doubtleſs ſaid alſo, *many Things that were not written in that Book; yet theſe*, ſays he, *are written that ye might believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have Life through his Name*[b]. This being then their Intention, can we poſſibly think they failed of it? Two of the Evangeliſts at leaſt were conſtantly preſent at our Saviour's Diſcourſes, the other two heard them either from him, or his immediate Followers, and they had the Promiſe of his Spirit *to bring all Things to*

[b] John xx. 30, 31.

their

their Remembrance whatſoever he had ſaid unto them[c]. Could they after all forget any Part of this that was material and neceſſary? That any of them ſhould do ſo is very ſtrange: much more that they all ſhould. That St. *Luke*, the Companion of the Apoſtles, and the Writer of their Acts, that he too, in relating what they taught their Converts, ſhould unhappily omit any Thing eſſential, ſtill adds to the Wonder: and that no one of the many Epiſtles written to inſtruct the Churches in their Faith and Duty, ſhould ſupply this Defect, is beyond all Belief.

But ſuppoſing the Scripture ever ſo perfect in itſelf, yet the Church of *Rome* objects that it is not clear to us: even to the Learned many Things are hard to be underſtood; which therefore to the Unlearned muſt be impoſſible. Nay ſometimes they tell us not one Sentence of it hath a Meaning, which by our own private Judgement we can be certain of. But ſurely the Apoſtles were not worſe Writers *with* a divine Aſſiſtance, than others commonly are *without* it. What they ſpoke and preached was plain; elſe they ſpoke to no Purpoſe: and why ſhould not the ſame Things be as plain when they were written down? Some Paſſages indeed

[c] John xiv. 26.

might

might to ſome Perſons be difficult, even at firſt: and more are doubtleſs become ſo by Length of Time. But that the Main of the New Teſtament is intelligible enough cannot be with any Modeſty denied. And for the reſt, what at firſt Sight is difficult, may with due Conſideration of our own, and Help of others, be made eaſy; what is obſcurely expreſſed in one Place, may be clearly expreſſed in another; and what is clearly expreſſed in no Place, we may ſafely for that very Reaſon conclude it is not neceſſary for us to underſtand or believe.

But allowing the Scriptures to have been at firſt ſufficiently intelligible, how do we know they are come down to us uncorrupted? I anſwer, by all the ſame Arguments which prove the Incorruptneſs of any other ancient Book in the World, and by this Argument farther, that theſe Books having many more Copies of them, being much wider diſperſed and much more carefully read, and warmly diſputed about, than any other whatever; it is in Proportion more incredible that either Chance or Deſign ſhould alter them in any Thing conſiderable without Diſcovery from ſome Quarter, even were no particular Providence to watch over Writings ſo worthy of its Care. And accordingly in Fact amidſt

amidſt all the various Readings which ſuch a Number of Copies muſt produce, there is not one that affects the leaſt Article of our Religion. But if ever ſo faithfully preſerved, ſtill how ſhall the Unlearned know when they are faithfully tranſlated? Why, moſt Paſſages all Parties agree in, and on thoſe they diſagree about, common Senſe, Compariſon of other Texts, Conſideration of what goes before and after, and conſulting, as Opportunity offers, judicious and honeſt Perſons of different Perſuaſions, will enable any Perſon to paſs a ſufficient Judgement, ſo far as he is concerned to judge, which is right and which is wrong, which is clear and which is doubtful. Indeed there is in general but little Danger of any groſs Impoſitions upon Men being attempted, much leſs ſucceeding for any Continuance, in a Land of Knowledge and Freedom, whatever may be or hath been under Popiſh Tyranny and Darkneſs. Since therefore the Scriptures contain a full and clear Account of Chriſtianity written by the very Apoſtles and firſt Diſciples of our Lord himſelf, and honeſtly delivered down into our Hands, we have plainly ſuch a Rule for our Faith as all Men in all Caſes are ever ſatisfied with, nor have we any Need to look farther. And yet the farther we do look into other pretended Rules, the better

we

we ſhall be ſatisfied with that we have already. For, let what will be ſaid againſt Scripture as not being a ſufficient Rule, it muſt be a ſufficient one, unleſs there be ſome other; and upon a fair Examination it will evidently appear there is no other. The *Romaniſts* indeed tell us of one which they ſpeak of in very high Terms; and that is the traditionary Doctrine of what they call the Catholic Church. The Apoſtles, they ſay, inſtructed their Converts very diligently in every Article of Faith. Thoſe Converts again, knowing it to be their indiſpenſable Duty, could not fail to inſtruct with the ſame Diligence, Miniſters their Flocks, Parents their Children, every Chriſtian his Neighbour. And thus, by a continued Succeſſion of teaching, all the Doctrines of Religion are handed down in their Church, they tell us, uncorrupted to this Day. Whoever either added, omitted or changed any Thing, muſt, they think, by every one round him, be immediately charged with a Miſtake; and, if he perſiſted in it, convicted of a Hereſy, whilſt the reſt were confirmed in the ancient Truth. And therefore to hold what the Church holds is a Rule that can never miſlead us. Now it muſt be owned indeed that our Saviour delivered his Doctrine to the Apoſtles, and they to all the

the World by Word of Mouth; and this Way of Delivery at firſt was ſufficient, and therefore St. *Paul* exhorts the *Theſſalonians to hold faſt the Traditions he had taught them, whether by Word or by Letter*[4]. But then in the Nature of Things how long could this laſt? Suppoſe but the eaſieſt common Story were to be told from one Perſon to another, without being written down for only 100 or 200 Years, and let each Perſon as he received it have never ſo ſtrict a Charge to tell it in the ſame Manner: yet, long before the End of that Time, what Security could we poſſibly have that it was true at firſt and unaltered ſtill? And you cannot but ſee there is much leſs Security that a conſiderable Number of Doctrines, eſpecially ſuch as compoſe the *Popiſh* Creed, ſhould be brought down ſafe for 1700 Years together, through ſo many Millions of Hands, that were all liable, through Ignorance, Forgetfulneſs, and Superſtition, to miſtake them, or, through Knavery and Deſign, to alter them. But it will be ſaid, in a Caſe of ſuch Importance as Religion, Men would be more careful in delivering Truth than in others. Undoubtedly they ought: but who can be ſecure that they would? It is of equal Importance to be careful in practiſing it too; yet we all know how this hath

[4] 2 Theſſ. ii. 15.

been neglected in the World: and therefore have Reaſon to think the other hath been no leſs ſo. But whoever made the firſt Change, they ſay, muſt have been immediately diſcovered. Now ſo far from this, that Perſons make Changes in what they relate without diſcovering it themſelves; Alterations come in by inſenſible Degrees: one Man leaves out, or varies, or adds one little Circumſtance: the next, another: till it grow imperceptibly into a different Thing. In one Age a Doctrine is delivered as a probable Opinion, the following Age ſpeaks of it as certain Truth: and the third advances it into an Article of Faith. Perhaps an Oppoſition riſes upon this, as many have done: ſome have ſaid ſuch a Doctrine *was* delivered to them, others that it was not: and who can tell whether at laſt the right Side or the wrong have prevailed? Only this is certain, that which ſoever prevails, though by a ſmall Majority at firſt, will uſe all Means of Art and Power to make it appear an univerſal Conſent at laſt; and then plead uninterrupted Tradition. But though ſuch Things as theſe may poſſibly be done in almoſt any Age, yet they are eaſy to be done in ſuch Ages, as were five or ſix of thoſe, that preceded the Reformation; when, by the Confeſſion

feſſion of their own Hiſtorians, both Clergy and Laity were ſo univerſally and ſo monſtrouſly ignorant and vicious, that nothing was too bad for them to do, or too abſurd for them to believe. But ſtill they tell us, we Proteſtants receive it upon the Authority of Tradition, that Scripture is the Word of God: and why can we not as well receive other Things upon the ſame Authority? I anſwer, we receive Scripture by no Means upon the Authority of Tradition merely: much leſs the Tradition of their preſent Church; but partly on Account of its own Reaſonableneſs, and the Characters of divine Wiſdom in it; partly from the Teſtimony, which one Part of it bears to the other; and laſtly upon the written Evidence given us, chiefly indeed by the earlieſt Chriſtians, but in ſome Meaſure alſo by Jews and Heathens themſelves, that the Authors of theſe Books were the Diſciples of our Lord, and the Things ſaid by them true. But then to tell us, that becauſe we receive Scripture upon this Evidence, we muſt therefore receive a long Liſt of Doctrines upon mere Tradition after 17 Ages, is to affirm that the Memory of Things may be as well preſerved for ever by general Rumour and Hearſay as by authentic Records. But here they

they plead that the Tradition which they depend on, is not altogether unwritten, but partly recorded by the ancient Fathers of the Church. To this we anſwer, that we acknowledge truly ancient Writers, in Matters where they all agree, to be a very valuable Evidence of the Faith, though at the ſame Time a fallible one. And we can prove undeniably, that theſe Writers, in Proportion as they lived near the Days of the Apoſtles, were of our Faith, not theirs. But as this is a Proof in our Favour that few Perſons are capable of entering into, ſo we have happily a much ſhorter. For if Antiquity be an Argument; the greater the Antiquity, the ſtronger the Argument: and therefore the Authority of the Bible, for this, as well as many other Reaſons, is the ſtrongeſt of all. An original Account is always to be depended on in the firſt Place. Such others, as come a little after, in Point of Time, may be of conſiderable Uſe to illuſtrate and confirm the former: but, wherever they appear to contradict it, muſt be rejected without Scruple. And thoſe which come a great deal after, ſuch as the Church of *Rome* chiefly depends on, deſerve little or no Credit. The Spirit of God therefore, ſeeing the Need there would be of it, inſpired the Apoſtles

Apoſtles and Evangeliſts to deliver a full and clear Rule of Faith to all Poſterity in the New Teſtament: certainly not that this might be interpreted afterwards by Tradition into whatever Senſe Men pleaſed; (for then Tradition alone had done as well or better without it) but that Tradition, as often as it went wrong, might be rectified by this. Had not Chriſtianity been committed in the earlieſt Ages to writing; long before this Time, in all Probability, there had been ſcarce one Doctrine of it left, which we could have been ſecure was genuine. And though Tradition hath doubtleſs been preſerved, by having ſome Regard to Scripture, from degenerating and varying near ſo much as it would elſe; yet, for Want of having a ſufficient Regard to it, firſt needleſs, then uncertain, then falſe and pernicious, Articles of Belief have crept in among Chriſtians: the very Steps of whoſe Entry, for the moſt Part, we can trace. The Faith of the firſt Ages changed by little and little every Age after, and ſtill for the worſe; till at Length the Church of *Rome*, about 200 Years ago, at the Council of *Trent*, when they were called upon to reform theſe Abuſes, moſt ſhamefully choſe to eſtabliſh them under the venerable Name of primitive Tradition, and

condemn all who will not receive them with the ſame Regard as Scripture itſelf. Juſt as in our Saviour's Time it was among the *Jews*; who aſked, *why walk not thy Diſciples according to the Tradition of the Elders? And he ſaid unto them, Full well ye reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own Tradition* [e]. And juſt as St. *Paul* had foretold it would happen among Chriſtians. *Beware, leſt any Man ſpoil you through vain Deceit, after the Tradition of Men, and not after Chriſt* [f]. But here they reply, that, let this Paſſage be deſigned againſt whom it will, it cannot poſſibly fall on them. For, however uncertain Tradition might become of itſelf in Proceſs of Time, and however difficult it may be for private Perſons to judge of Doctrines by it, yet the Judgement of the Catholic Church in theſe Points is infallible, and theirs is that Catholic Church. Now that the Church is infallible, they ſometimes attempt to prove from Reaſon. Making it ſo was the only Way to end Diſputes, and therefore God being wiſe and good, *muſt* have made it ſo. But certainly a much more effectual Way of preventing Diſputes and Errors had been to have made every ſingle Man infallible; and yet

[e] Mark vii. 5, 9. [f] Col. ii. 8.

God

God hath not done this. It might therefore be more modeſt for them to let him ſhow his Wiſdom and Goodneſs in what Way he pleaſes. The *Jewiſh* Church, we know, was not infallible. For they denied their Saviour, and it was by following Tradition that they came to do it. How then does it appear that the Chriſtian muſt be more infallible? Why, they have Texts of Scripture to prove this. But if, as they commonly tell us, the Scripture can neither be proved nor underſtood but by the infallible Authority of the Church; how can the infallible Authority of the Church be proved or underſtood by Scripture? However let us hear theſe Texts. Our Saviour told his Apoſtles, that the Comforter *ſhould come and lead them into all Truth*[g]. But perhaps this was ſaid only to the Apoſtles: and, had it been ſaid to them and their Succeſſors, or, which is ſtill a different Thing, to the whole Church; yet ſo St. *John*[h] tells all Believers, *they have an Unction from the holy one, and know all Things*; that is, Things neceſſary: not that they were not capable of miſtaking, but that, with due Care, they might avoid it if they would. Again he promiſed his Diſciples, that *he would be with them to the End*

[g] John xvi. 13. [h] 1 John ii. 20.

of the World [j]. And so he hath promised every single Christian to be *with them and dwell in them* [k]: yet this does not hinder but they may both misunderstand and even renounce Christianity if they please. But he declares also, that *the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church* [l]. But *the Gates of Hell*, or, as it might be translated, of the invisible World, mean nothing else than the Power of Death, *i. e.* the Terror of Persecution, as the Learned well know. And it can never follow, that because Persecution shall not destroy the Church, Error shall not corrupt it. Or were this Expression, the *Gates of Hell*, to comprehend Error, it must at least equally comprehend Sin. And therefore, as this Promise does not hinder the Church universal from being more or less defiled by Sin, so neither from being deformed by Error. And the most our Saviour meant to promise, is, that neither shall totally abolish, though, through the Faults of Men, both may greatly pollute it. They plead farther, that St. *Paul* says, *the Church of God is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth* [m]: but they know at the same Time, that this Passage of St. *Paul* is fairly capable of

[j] Matt. xxviii. 20. [k] 2 Cor. vi. 16. [l] Matt. xvi. 18. [m] 1 Tim. iii. 15.

two

two other Tranſlations, either of which turns it to a different Senſe. Or were this the only Senſe; we acknowledge the Church was then, and ought always to be, and in ſome Meaſure always is, a Pillar and Support of Truth; and ſo in his Proportion is every Believer: and therefore of every ſingle good Chriſtian our Saviour ſays, in the *Revelation* [n], *I will make him a Pillar in the Temple of my God.* But then it does not follow from hence, that any one Chriſtian, or the Majority of Chriſtians, ſo ſupport the Truth, as that they do and ever will profeſs it all, without any Mixture of Error: and unleſs this be done, there is no Infallibility. But they argue farther, that our Saviour directs [o], *If a Man neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.* But what is he there ſpeaking of? Let us read the Context. *If thy Brother ſhall treſpaſs againſt thee, go, and tell him his Fault between him and thee alone. If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more. If he ſhall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church. If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.* That is, if a Man have done you an Injury, firſt admoniſh him

[n] Rev. iii. 12. [o] Matt. xviii. 17.

privately of it. If that avail not, tell the Church: not the univerſal Church ſure throughout all the World, but the particular one you both belong to. And if he will not reform upon their Reproof, look on him no longer as a true Chriſtian, but an ill Man. Here therefore is not one Word ſaid about diſobeying the Determination of the Catholic Church concerning a diſputed Doctrine: but about ſlighting the Admonition of a particular Church concerning a known Sin, and particular Churches are owned to be fallible.

Again, they ſay it is an Article of our Creed, that we *believe in the Catholic Church.* But then they know the Meaning of this is not that we believe whatever this Church, or any who pleaſe to call themſelves ſo, ſhall at any Time aſſert. But, as believing in the Reſurrection of the Body, is only believing that ſuch a Reſurrection ſhall be, ſo believing in the Catholic Church is only believing that ſuch a Church is: that Chriſt hath united his Followers into one regular Society or Body, of which himſelf is the Head: which Society or Church is therefore called Catholic or Univerſal, becauſe it conſiſts of all Nations; whereas the *Jewiſh* Church was not Catholic, but particular,

ticular, consisting only of one Nation. But whether this Church be infallible or not, the Creed says nothing. They that can lay a Stress on such wretched Arguments as these, how would they have triumphed had the same Things been said of their Church, that are said of the *Jewish* Church? *If there arise a Matter too hard for thee in Judgement*, says *Moses*, *thou shalt come unto the Priests the Levites, that shall be in those Days, and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall inform thee; thou shalt not decline from the Sentence that they shall show thee, to the right Hand nor to the left*[p]; *for by their Word shall every Controversy be tried*[q]. *The Scribes and Pharisees*, says our Saviour, *sit in Moses' Seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do*[r]. Now if these very strong Expressions did not prove that Church infallible, (as certainly they do not; for then Christianity which they rejected would not be true) how can much weaker Expressions prove any other to be so? But they who will needs have the Church to be infallible, and the Rule of our Faith instead of Scripture; what Part of it do they make the Infallibility reside in? For unless that be clearly known, we are

[p] Deut. xvii. 8, &c. [q] Deut. xxi. 5. [r] Matt. xxiii. 3.

never the better for it; but inſtead of the ſame Rule of Faith, every different Opinion about this Matter will produce a different Rule of Faith. And it is a Matter, in which the Opinions of the *Romaniſts* differ greatly. Many of them ſay the Pope is infallible, and he himſelf claims to be ſo. But then ſome think he is ſo in Matters of Faith only, ſome in Matters of Fact too. In moſt Popiſh Countries it would be looked upon as Hereſy to deny him this Prerogative; in others as great Weakneſs to aſcribe it to him. For a large Part of them ſay nothing is infallible under a general Council, regularly called. But then they have ſo many different Opinions about what makes a Council general, and what Call of one is regular, that ſome of them reckon at leaſt eighteen general Councils, and ſome at moſt but ſeven or eight: and indeed they might very juſtly queſtion whether, ſtrictly ſpeaking, there was ever one ſuch in the World. But farther: which of the Decrees and Canons of theſe Councils, amongſt the infinite Forgeries there have been, are genuine, and which not, here again is an endleſs Controverſy; and another as endleſs what the Meaning of ſome of the moſt important ones of them is. In Conſequence of this they differ and diſ-

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pute, and have done for Ages, (as united as they would ſeem to be) not only about ſuch ſilly Queſtions, as whether the Virgin *Mary* was conceived in original Sin or not, (and yet about this they were calling one another Heretics for 300 Years, and their general Councils, with all their Infallibility, have not dared to determine the Matter to this Day;) but they quarrel equally about Things of the greateſt Moment. To give but one Inſtance of many: whether a King may, for Hereſy or Diſobedience to the Church, be depoſed, and his Subjects diſcharged of their Allegiance, is a Queſtion of as much Weight as can well be put. The Popes and great Part of their Church for 600 Years have held they might; and have practiſed accordingly, as moſt Nations in their Turns have felt. But what Tradition hath taught, and general Councils have decreed on this Point, is ſo various and contradictory, that it would take a Man's Life almoſt to inquire into it. So that ſome *Popiſh* Writers ſpeak of the Affirmative of this Queſtion as an Article of Faith; and ſome as a moſt impious Error. One or the other muſt be impious, undoubtedly. Which then are the Heretics? and what is their Infallibility good for, that either cannot,

or will not, decide Queſtions of ſuch Importance to human Society as this? But to proceed: Some of that Communion allow not even Councils to be infallible, and account no Doctrine fundamental, unleſs the whole Body of the *Roman* Church hath received it as ſuch. And how ſhall the ignorant know with Certainty when they have all received it, and in what Senſe they have received it? But why the whole Body of the *Roman* Church? What Claim hath ſhe of being always in the right more than the Churches of *Greece*, of *Aſia*, or *Æthiopia*, who differ from her, as well as we, in many Things, and allow her no ſuch Privilege? Nor, which is more, did St. *Paul* know of any ſhe had in the leaſt: but in his Epiſtle to the Church of *Rome*, bids her *not to be high-minded, but fear: for if God ſpared not the Jews, take heed, leſt he alſo ſpare not thee. Behold therefore, the Goodneſs and Severity of God: On them—Severity: but towards thee, Goodneſs: if thou continue in his Goodneſs, otherwiſe thou alſo ſhalt be cut off.* Strange Treatment, ſure, of an infallible Church! Some Perſons therefore have held Infallibility to reſide not in the Church of *Rome* particularly, but in the whole Body of Chriſtians conſidered as one, which indeed is

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the only true Catholic, or Univerſal Church. But the whole Body of Chriſtians, in the Nature of Things, can never meet: and, were it as eaſy, as it is difficult, to collect their ſeveral Opinions, what one Point ſhould we find them all in all Ages agree in as neceſſary, beſides thoſe general Doctrines of Chriſtianity, that are on every Hand allowed to be clearly contained in Scripture? Which Way ſoever then we ſeek for a Rule of Faith, to Scripture-Doctrine we muſt return: and therefore the beſt Way is, never to depart from it.

But here ſome of the *Romaniſts* (for they differ about it) will ſay we wrong them. They admit Scripture for the Rule of Faith. But do they admit it for the only one? This they dare not ſay. Or, if they did, will they allow us, when we have this Rule, to know what it means? No, we muſt never underſtand the leaſt Part of it, though ever ſo plain, in any different Senſe from what the Church is pleaſed to appoint. What then is this but mocking Mankind, and giving with one Hand, what they immediately take away with the other? But we, they ſay, are in a pitiable Condition, that, having only the dead Letter of Scripture to go by, and no living Guide or Judge to direct us in the Interpretation

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of it, as they have; Controverſies are always riſing among us, and can never be decided. To this we anſwer, that Controverſies are what they themſelves, even with Perſecution to help them, can neither prevent or end any more than we. And in Matters of Property indeed, ſome Deciſion, right or wrong, muſt be made. Society could not ſubſiſt without it: but what Need of an infallible Deciſion in Matters of Faith? Why is it not ſufficient that every Man determine for himſelf as well as he can in this World; and that God, the only infallible Judge, will determine with Equity concerning us all in the next? But the Generality of People, they ſay, are incapable of judging for themſelves. Yet the New Teſtament ſuppoſes them both capable of it, and bound to it; and accordingly requires them not only to *try the Spirits*, the Pretences to Infallibility, *whether they be of God*[t], but to *prove all Things, and hold faſt that which is good*[u]. But were this otherwiſe; if they are incapable of judging, why do you perſuade them to change their Judgement? Let them alone in the Way they are in. But if they have Judgement enough to determine whether the Catholic Church be infallible, whether the

[t] 1 John iv. 1. [u] 1 Theſſ. v. 21.

Church

Church of *Rome* be the Catholic Church, whether this Infallibility be in Pope or Council, which Decrees of either are genuine, and what is the true Meaning of thoſe Decrees; all which Things they muſt determine before the Infallibility of the Church can be any Guide to them: if I ſay every plain Man hath Ability enough for ſuch Points as theſe, why hath he not Ability enough in other Caſes, to underſtand common Senſe and plain Scripture: to judge whether Tranſubſtantiation, for Inſtance, be not contrary to the one, and Image Worſhip to the other? The *Romaniſts* themſelves own, that Men muſt uſe their Eyes to find this Guide: why then muſt they afterwards put them out to follow him? Eſpecially conſidering that the only Rule, which above ninety-nine Parts in a Hundred of their Communion have to follow, is not the Doctrine of Councils and Popes even were they infallible: (for of theſe it is infinitely harder to know any Thing than of Scripture,) but merely what a few Prieſts, and private Writers tell them; and ſo at laſt, all the Pretence to being directed by Infallibility, ends in being led blindfold by Men, confeſſedly as fallible as themſelves. But all Chriſtians are com-

commanded, they ſay, to *obey them that have the Rule over them in the Lord* *. And it is true, the teaching of the Miniſters of the Goſpel ought to be attended upon: their Doctrine followed in all clear Caſes, and their Judgement reſpected even in doubtful ones. But ſtill we are no more bound to follow our ſpiritual Guides into Opinions plainly falſe, or Practices plainly ſinful, than to follow a common Guide down a Precipice, or into the Sea, let our own Knowledge of the Way be ever ſo little, or the other's Pretences to infallible Skill in it ever ſo great. The Rule therefore for the unlearned and ignorant in Religion is this. Let each Man improve his own Judgement and increaſe his own Knowledge as much as he can: and be fully aſſured that God will expect no more. In Matters, for which he muſt rely on Authority, let him rely on the Authority of that Church which God's Providence hath placed him under, rather than another which he hath nothing to do with; and truſt thoſe, who, by encouraging free Inquiry, appear to love Truth, rather than ſuch as, by requiring all their Doctrines to be implicitly obeyed, ſeem conſcious that they will not bear to be fairly tried. But never let

* Heb. xiii. 17.

him

him prefer any Authority before that which is the higheſt of all Authority, the written Word of God. This therefore let us all carefully ſtudy, and not doubt but that whatever Things in it are neceſſary to be believed, are eaſy to be underſtood. This let us firmly rely on, and truſt to its Truth, when it declares itſelf *able to make us wiſe unto Salvation, perfect, and thoroughly furniſhed unto all good Works* [x]. Let others build on Fathers and Popes, on Traditions and Councils, what they will: let us continue firm, as we are, *on the Foundation of the Apoſtles and Prophets; Jeſus Chriſt being the chief Corner Stone* [y].

[x] 2 Tim. iii. 13—17. [y] Eph. ii. 20.

SERMON XIII.

1 PET. v. 12.

——*Exhorting and teſtifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.*

THE general Rule of Conduct for Men to go by is Reaſon: contrary to what this plainly teaches, we neither can nor ought to believe; but beyond what it teaches, on ſufficient Authority, we juſtly may. Perſuaſion founded on Authority is called Faith: and that which is founded on the Authority of our bleſſed Lord, Chriſtian Faith.

Now the Rule of this Faith, the only Means by which we, who live ſo many Ages after him, can learn with Certainty what Things he hath required as neceſſary, and what he hath forbidden as unlawful, I have proved to be the holy Scriptures. For theſe, which confeſſedly give us a true Account of Chriſtianity, do alſo,

as I have ſhown to you, give us a full and ſufficiently clear Account of it: and there is none whatever beſides that can be equally depended on. Other Antiquity compared with that of Scripture is modern: Tradition in its own Nature ſoon grows uncertain: and Infallibility is no where to be found upon Earth. The only Thing then we have to rely on in Chriſtianity, is the written Word of God. Whatever this forbids is ſinful: whatever it requires as a Condition of Salvation is neceſſary: whatever it does not ſo require, is not neceſſary. By theſe Rules therefore of Reaſon and Scripture, let us now proceed, as was propoſed in the ſecond Place, to try the chief of thoſe Doctrines which diſtinguiſh the Church of *Rome* from ours.

To begin with that which is naturally firſt, the Object of Worſhip. We worſhip God, and pray to him through the Mediation of Jeſus Chriſt. This they acknowledge to be right. The Saints in Heaven we love and honour as Members of the ſame myſtical Body with ourſelves. The holy Angels we reverence as the Miniſters of the Divine Will. But as for praying to either, there being no Argument for it in Reaſon, nor Precept in Scripture, nor indeed Example in Antiquity for at leaſt 300 Years after

after Scripture, it ſurely cannot be a Thing neceſſary. Letting it alone is undoubtedly ſafe: whether practiſing it be ſo, the Church of *Rome* would do well to conſider. They tell us indeed that they only beg the Prayers of the Saints in Heaven, as we do thoſe of good Perſons on Earth. And were this true; (as I ſhall prove it is not) we deſire our Fellow Chriſtians on Earth to pray for us becauſe we know they hear our Deſires: and ſurely it is Reaſon enough not to aſk thoſe in Heaven to do it, becauſe we do not know they hear us, nor have the leaſt Cauſe to think they do. For Scripture, which alone could tell us ſo, hath told us no ſuch Thing. But beſides, if we can at all underſtand Scripture, it hath expreſsly forbidden all Applications to the Inhabitants of the inviſible World, excepting the Supreme Being. *Thou ſhalt worſhip the Lord thy God,* ſays *Moſes, and him only ſhalt thou ſerve*[a]. *There is one God and one Mediator,* ſays St. *Paul, between God and Men the Man Chriſt Jeſus*[b]. Accordingly we find, that the Angel which appeared to St. *John* in the *Revelation,* forbids any religious Honour to be paid him, even when preſent. *See thou do it not: I am thy Fellow Servant: worſhip*

[a] Matt. iv. 10. [b] 1 Tim. ii. 5.

God [c]. And when ſome amongſt the *Coloſſians* had affected unjuſtifiable Practices of this Kind, St. *Paul* cenſures them as being in a very dangerous Error. *Let no Man beguile you of your Reward in a voluntary Humility and worſhipping of Angels, intruding into thoſe Things which he hath not ſeen* [d]. Yet does the Church of *Rome intrude* ſo much farther as to pay undue Worſhip to Beings far below Angels: not only to the Saints in Heaven, but to ſome who were ſo wicked on Earth, that there is great Reaſon to fear they are in Hell, and to others that are mere Fictions of their own Imaginations, and never were at all. For the Sake of theſe, and through their Merits, they deſire in their public and authorized Prayers, God's Mercy, ſometimes quite omitting to mention the Merits of Chriſt, and ſometimes joining his and theirs together. Farther than this, they directly pray to them, in the Houſe of God, and in the ſame Poſture in which they pray to God; and that not only to intercede with him for them, but, in ſo many Words, that they themſelves *would beſtow Grace and Mercy upon them, would forgive the Guilt of their Sins, deliver them from Hell, and grant them a Place in Heaven.* What Pretence is there now in

[c] Rev. xix. 10. xxii. 9. [d] Col. ii. 18.

Chriſtianity

Chriſtianity for ſuch Things as theſe? and what doth this tend to, but making the Ignorant, eſpecially, think their favourite Saint can do every Thing for them, right or wrong? To Him therefore they recommend themſelves, not by a religious Life, but by flattering Addreſſes and coſtly Preſents: on His Interceſſion they often depend much more than on our bleſſed Saviour's; and being ſecure, as they think, of the Favour of theſe Courtiers of Heaven, pay little Regard to the King of it. Thus is the Intent of Religion deſtroyed, and the Heathen Multitude of Deities brought ſilently back into Chriſtianity. But above all, their Worſhip of the Virgin *Mary* is very remarkable. We honour her Memory as a Perſon whom *he that is mighty hath* peculiarly *magnified*, and whom *all Generations ſhall call bleſſed* [e]. But They addreſs her in ſuch Terms as follow: *Empreſs of Heaven; Queen of Angels and Men; through whom, after God, the whole Earth liveth; Mother of Mercy; the Fountain of Grace and Salvation; the only Hope of Sinners: Who ever truſted in thee, and was confounded? To thee I commit all my Hope, and all my Comfort: under thy Defence is my Refuge; make Haſte to help me in all*

[e] Luke i. 48, 49.

Things which I ſhall either do or think every Moment of my Life, looſe the Bonds of the guilty, enlighten the Eyes of the blind, free us from all Sin, and drive away from us all Evil: grant us to eſcape eternal Damnation, and cauſe the Glory of Paradiſe to be beſtowed on us. What Authority or what Excuſe is there now for ſuch Expreſſions as theſe? And yet every one of them I have myſelf collected partly out of their public Offices, partly from others of their authorized and approved Books of Devotion. Formerly in their very Maſs Book they went yet farther: And *begged her, by Virtue of her parental Authority, to command of her Son what they wanted.* But to this very Day, in another Office, they intimate the ſame Thing, by exhorting her that *ſhe would ſhew herſelf to be his Mother.* And the better to make ſure of her doing ſo, they apply to St. *Joachim*, who, they ſay, was her Father, though indeed it is not certainly known at all who her Father was; much leſs whether he was Saint or Sinner: However, they apply to St. *Joachim* and tell him, that *as his Daughter can poſſibly deny him nothing, it is in his Power to do every Thing he will for them.* This, you ſee, is being very artful in making Intereſt: only it is more Art than

than is neceſſary. For ſince we are both permitted and appointed to approach God through Chriſt directly, who, we are certain, both doth hear and will help us, we ſhall prejudice, inſtead of benefiting our Cauſe, by making underhand Applications to other Perſons, who perhaps never come to know of our Petitions, and, if they do, are diſpleaſed at them; or, if they were not, can be in Compariſon of little Uſe to us.

Yet to judge by the Practice of the *Romiſh* Church, who would not think that the whole New Teſtament were filled with Precepts for the Worſhip of the Saints, eſpecially the bleſſed Virgin? Whereas, even in the *Goſpels* ſhe is but ſeldom and occaſionally mentioned; our Saviour ſeeming on Purpoſe to take leſs Notice of her, as if he foreſaw what Advantages taking more would give to the Extravagancies of after Times. In the *Acts* ſhe is juſt mentioned once. In the *Epiſtles* and *Revelation* not at all. Yet theſe are not half the monſtrous Things that the *Romaniſts* are guilty of about her. They have invented a Fable of her Body being taken up into Heaven, and appointed a ſolemn Feſtival in Honour of it. They have inſtituted a Form of Devotion called the *Roſary*, in which ten

Addreſſes are made to her, for one to God; and ſucceſſive Popes have granted large Indulgences and Bleſſings to all that ſhall ſay it. Then their private Writers about her have gone incredible Lengths. One of their Cardinals, *Bonaventure*, by putting her Name inſtead of God's, and ſome other neceſſary Alterations, hath applied the whole Book of *Pſalms* to her. In the ſame Manner he hath altered the *Te Deum*. *We praiſe thee, O Mary, we acknowledge thee to be the Lady*; and ſo in the other Hymns of the Church. Nay, he hath made a Creed for her in Imitation of St. *Athanaſius*'s. *Whoever will be ſaved, it is neceſſary that he hold the true Faith concerning Mary; which except a Man keep whole and undefiled, he ſhall periſh everlaſtingly*. Now if their Church do really diſapprove theſe Things, why do they never cenſure them? Why is this very Man canonized for a Saint, whilſt we are condemned as Heretics? For not content with thinking this Kind of Worſhip lawful, they pronounce accurſed whoever ſhall think otherwiſe.

Another Thing we differ in, is this: They make Pictures of God the Father under the Likeneſs of a venerable old Man. They make Images of Chriſt and of his Saints, after their

own Fancy. Before these Images, and even that of his Cross, they kneel down and prostrate themselves: to these they lift up their Eyes, and in that Posture pray. The least Appearance of Command, or even the Allowance, of such Practices in Scripture they pretend not; and yet against those who disallow them, they thunder out Anathemas. Now as to Pictures of the Father Almighty, *whom no Man either hath seen, or can see*[f]; all visible Figures must represent him such as he is not, must lead the Ignorant into low and mean Ideas of him, and give those of better Abilities, from a Contempt of such Representation, a Contempt of the Religion that uses them. Anciently the *Heathens* themselves had no Images of God; and a very learned *Heathen* observes, that if they had never had any, their Worship would have been the purer; for the Inventors of these Things, says he, lessened among Men the Reverence of the Divine Nature, and introduced Errors concerning it[g]. The *Jews*, though the Old Testament figuratively expresses, in Words, the Power and Attributes of God by Parts of the human Form, were yet most strictly forbidden all sen-

[f] 1 Tim. vi. 16. [g] Varro ap. S. Aug. de Civ. Dei. l. 4. c. 31. where he says they had none for 170 Years. But *Tarquinius Priscus* introduced them. See *Tenison* on Idol. p. 59.

sible

ſible Repreſentations of him under any Form. *Take good Heed unto yourſelves*, ſays Moſes, *for ye ſaw no Manner of Similitude on the Day that the Lord ſpoke to you in Horeb; leſt ye corrupt yourſelves, leſt ye forget the Covenant of the Lord your God, and make the Similitude of any Figure; for the Lord thy God is a conſuming Fire, even a jealous God*[h]. Accordingly we find, that when they had made a Golden Image, tho' it was expreſsly deſigned in honour of that God who brought them out of *Egypt*, it was notwithſtanding puniſhed as Idolatry. And far from allowing to Chriſtians, what was then forbidden the *Jews*, St. *Paul* moſt ſeverely condemns it in the very Heathens, that *when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their Imaginations, and changed the Glory of the incorruptible God, into an Image made like to corruptible Man*[i]. Yet how near doth this approach to what the Church of *Rome* doth now, in making Pictures of God the Father! Our bleſſed Saviour indeed, having taken on him human Nature, is capable of being repreſented in a human Form. But, as all ſuch Repreſentations muſt be imaginary ones, ſo they are uſeleſs ones too: the Memorial of himſelf, which

[h] Deut. iv. 15—24. [i] Rom. i. 21, 23.

he

he hath appointed in the Sacrament, we may be assured is sufficient to all good Purposes; and these other Memorials have always produced absurd and wicked Superstitions. As for the Images of the Saints, it is sufficient to say, that there being no Pretence for worshipping the Saints themselves, there is yet less Pretence for worshipping these Representations of them. But here the Church of *Rome* will say we wrong them: they do not worship Images, but only Christ and his Saints by these Images. But indeed it is they who wrong themselves then. For not a few of their own Writers [k] frankly own they do worship Images, and with the same Degree of Worship that they pay to the Persons whose Images they are. And for the Cross particularly, in their public Offices, they expressly declare themselves to adore it, and in plain Words, petition it in one of their Hymns, *to give Increase of Grace to the Righteous, and Pardon to the Guilty.* This they say is a poetical Licence; and truly, in so serious a Thing as Worship, no small one. But farther: had

[k] *Aquinas*, &c. See *Trapp.* Ch. of *England* defended, p. 219. They put in the *Index Exp.* those Passages in Marginal Notes and Indexes, that say the contrary. See Instances, ib. p. 235. They are to be worshipped, says *Bellarmine*, *ita ut ipsæ terminent venerationem, ut in se considerantur & non solum ut vicem gerunt exemplaris. Bellarm. de Imag.* l. ii. c. 21. *ap. Vitr. in Is.* xliv. 20.

they

they no Regard to the Image, but only to the Perſon repreſented, why is an Image in one Place looked upon to have ſo much more Power and Virtue, than an Image of the ſame Perſon in another Place? Why hath that of our Lady of *Loretto*, for Inſtance, ſo much more Honour done it, than that of our Lady any where elſe? We own the Council of *Trent* does gives a Caution, that no Divinity be aſcribed to Images, nor any Truſt put in them: And the Heathen gave the like Caution often with Reſpect to theirs: but this never hinders the Scripture from condemning them as Idolaters. And the Reaſon is, that ſuch Cautions never are, or can be obſerved by the Multitude. Place ſenſible Objects before them to direct their Worſhip to: and in thoſe Objects their Worſhip will terminate. This the primitive Chriſtians ſaw too plainly in the Heathens, ever to think of imitating them. Accordingly neither Images nor Pictures were allowed in Churches for near 400 Years. And when, after being more than once condemned, they came to be allowed, no Honour was intended to be paid to them. On the contrary, when it began to be paid, which indeed was not long, it was ſeverely cenſured, and particularly in the eighth Century, by above 300 Biſhops,

ſhops, aſſembled in Council at *Conſtantinople*. But about thirty Years after, the ſecond Council of *Nice*, (ſo ill did Councils agree) eſtabliſhed it. Yet even this Council held Repreſentations of *God* to be unlawful. And all the Weſtern Countries, except *Italy*, under the Pope's immediate Direction, continued to condemn the *Worſhip* of *all* Repreſentations, for ſome Ages afterwards. But by Degrees it firſt became general; and then ſo groſsly ſcandalous, that the Church of *Rome*, it ſeems, hath judged it the wiſeſt Way to leave the ſecond Commandment, which too plainly forbids theſe Things, out of their ſmaller Books of Devotion, under the abſurd Pretence of its being only a Part, I ſuppoſe an inſignificant one, of the firſt: though, ſince they have been charged with this, they have thought fit in ſome of them, but not in all, to reſtore it again. And here let us quit the Article of Image-Worſhip, with the Pſalmiſt's Remark upon it. *They that make them are like unto them; ſo is every one that truſteth in them. O Iſrael, truſt thou in the Lord* [1].

But there ſtill remains another Object of *Popiſh* Worſhip, the Sacramental Bread and Wine. For they have made it an Article of Faith, that

[1] Pſ. cxv. 8, 9.

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the Subſtance of theſe is, by the Words of Conſecration, intirely changed into the Subſtance of the living Body and Blood of Chriſt: which Change therefore, they call *Tranſubſtantiation*. Now, were this really the Body of Chriſt, 'tis allowed we have no Command to worſhip it under this Diſguiſe, and therefore commit no Sin in letting ſuch Worſhip alone. But if it be really not ſo, they own themſelves to pay that Honour to a Bit of Bread, which belongs only to the eternal Son of God. And ſurely one ſhould think it a Queſtion eaſily decided, whether a ſmall Wafer, which is the Bread they uſe on theſe Occaſions, be the Body of a Man, and whether Wine in a Cup be Blood. Almoſt every one of our Senſes will tell us it is not: And though, in ſome haſty or diſtant Appearances of Things, our Senſes may be deceived, yet, if, where there is all poſſible Opportunity of examining the Matter, we cannot be ſure of what our own Eyes and our own Feeling, our Smelling and Taſting, all inform us of, then we can be ſure of nothing. 'Tis only by ſuch Evidence that we know any Thing in this World: 'tis by no other that we know we have a Revelation from God, and that this Sacrament is appointed in

it. If therefore we are not to believe our Senſes, how are we to believe any Thing at all? But indeed what they tell us in this Caſe, is as contrary to all Reaſon, as it is to all Senſe. That a human Body in its full Dimenſions ſhould be contained in the Space of an Inch or two, looks as like a Contradiction as any Thing well can do: that the Subſtance of Bread ſhould not be in the Sacrament, where they own all the Properties of Bread are, and that the Subſtance of Fleſh ſhould be there, and not one of the Properties of it appear, is very monſtrous; and that the very ſame Body of Chriſt, which is now in Heaven at the right Hand of God, ſhould at the ſame Time be on Earth in the right Hand of the Prieſt; and that there ſhould be ſeveral thouſands of thoſe Bodies upon Earth at many hundreds of Miles Diſtance from one another, and yet all theſe be that very ſame one Body alſo, this is ſuch Talk, that for ſober Perſons in their ſober Senſes to uſe it, and keep their Countenance, is very ſtrange. If one and one be two, then one Body of Chriſt here, and one Body of Chriſt there, make two Bodies of Chriſt, which they own he hath not. And if one Body can be in more than one Place at one Time, we may all of us perhaps be now this

very

very Inſtant at *Rome* as well as here: a Man may be at ever ſo many thouſand Miles Diſtance from himſelf, and afterwards he may come and meet himſelf, (as two of their pretended real Bodies of Chriſt often do;) and then paſs by himſelf and go away from himſelf to the ſame Diſtance he was at before: he may in one Place be ſtanding ſtill, in another be carried along, and ſo be in Motion and not in Motion at the ſame Time. Men may ſay ſuch Things as theſe if they will: and they may believe them if they can. But in order to it, well do they direct their poor People to profeſs in their *Engliſh* Manual of Prayers before Maſs, 1725, p. 409. *Herein I utterly renounce the Judgement of my Senſes, and all human Underſtanding.*

Here therefore we fix our Foot: If theſe Things be to every Man living evidently abſurd and impoſſible, then let no Body ever regard the moſt ſpecious Pretences of proving ſuch Doctrines, or the Authority of a Church that maintains them. It is no hard Matter for an artful Man, a little practiſed in diſputing, ſo to confound a plain Man upon almoſt any Subject, that he ſhall not well know how to anſwer, though he ſees himſelf to be right, and the other wrong. This is an Art which the Prieſts

of

of the Church of *Rome* are well verſed in. Indeed the chief Part of their Learning is to puzzle themſelves firſt, and as many others as they can afterwards. But always obſerve this Rule: Stick to common Senſe againſt the World: and whenever a Man would perſuade you of any Thing evidently contrary to that, never be moved by any Tricks and Fetches of Sophiſtry, let him uſe ever ſo many. He will be for proving to you by round-about Arguments, of which you are unqualified to judge, that his Church is infallible, and therefore Tranſubſtantiation is true. Do you anſwer him by a much plainer Argument, of which you are very well qualified to judge: that Tranſubſtantiation cannot poſſibly be true, and therefore his Church is not infallible.

But they plead; with God all Things are poſſible, and therefore this is ſo. Now we own that all Things which are not impoſſible in themſelves, are poſſible with Him; but God himſelf cannot do what in its own Nature cannot be done. For Inſtance, he cannot deſtroy his own Being, he cannot ceaſe to be juſt and good, becauſe this hath a Contradiction in it; and for the ſame Reaſon he cannot do any Thing elſe that hath a Contradiction in it: for that would

be doing a Thing and at the ſame Time not doing it: to aſcribe which to God is not to magnify, but mock his Power.

But they ſay further, that Tranſubſtantiation hath no more Difficulty than the Trinity hath. But ſurely the Difference is very viſible. The Doctrine of the Trinity indeed is a Myſtery: that is, the whole of the Subject cannot be fully underſtood by us. But in Tranſubſtantiation there is no Myſtery at all. For the moſt evident Falſhoods are as juſt clearly underſtood to be ſo as the moſt evident Truths. In the Trinity there is nothing we ſee to be falſe; only we do not ſee the particular Manner in which ſome Things ſaid concerning it are true: but in Tranſubſtantiation there are many Things we ſee to be falſe, and which can in no Manner be true. Let them ſhow us any Contradiction in the Doctrine of the Trinity, and we will believe it no longer. In the mean Time, ſince we have ſhown Contradiction in Tranſubſtantiation, let *them* believe *that* no longer.

But they have Scripture to plead for it. Now if this were a Doctrine of Scripture, it would ſooner prove Scripture to be falſe, than Scripture could prove it to be true; and therefore the Papiſts, by making ſuch a monſtrous Ab-

ſurdity an Article of Faith, have loaded their Religion with a Weight, which, did it belong to Chriſtianity, were able to ſink it. But, God be thanked, Scripture is no more on their Side than Reaſon. We know indeed that our Saviour ſaid when he gave the Sacrament, *This is my Body*. But ſo at another Time he ſaid, *Verily verily I am the Door of the Sheep:* and at a third, *I am the Vine*. And ſo have all Mankind always called a Repreſentation of any Thing by the Name of what it repreſented. Why then is He not to be underſtood in the ſame Figure here? How do we think the Apoſtles underſtood him but as they were uſed to do in ſuch Caſes? They who were ſo backward at comprehending difficult Things, and ſo ready to aſk Queſtions about them, did they without any Surprize or any Queſtion apprehend that our Saviour then took his own Body in his own Hand, and gave that one Body to each of his twelve Apoſtles at the ſame Time, and that each of them ſwallowed him down their Throats, though he was all the while ſitting at the Table along with them? Such Things are too ridiculous to be mentioned in a ſerious Place, and yet theſe Men force us to it by gravely requiring us to believe them. The only conſiderable Paſ-

ſage beſides, that they plead, is in the ſixth Chapter of St. *John*; where many *Jews* having followed our Saviour becauſe he had fed them with the Miracle of the Loaves, he bids them *labour not for the Meat which periſheth, but that which endureth unto everlaſting Life, which He would give them who is the true Bread from Heaven.* Now were this meant of the Sacrament, and to be underſtood literally, we muſt conclude not Bread turned into Chriſt's Body, but his Body turned into Bread; which is quite the contrary to what they hold. But indeed the whole is only a figurative Way of ſaying that the Souls of Men receive from the Fruits of his Death a much more valuable Nouriſhment than their Bodies receive from their daily Food. Juſt as he elſewhere ſays [m], *Whoever drinketh of the Water that I ſhall give him, it ſhall be in him a Well of Water ſpringing up into everlaſting Life*; which no Body ever underſtood literally: and juſt as Wiſdom ſpeaks of herſelf in *Ecclus* xxiv. 21. *They that eat me ſhall yet be hungry, and they that drink me ſhall yet be thirſty*; that is, they who have taſted the Pleaſures and Benefits of Virtue will always deſire a ſtill greater Experience of them. But the *Jews*, with their uſual Perverſeneſs, cavilling

[m] John iv. 14.

at

at theſe Words of our Saviour's, he goes on very ſtrongly to aſſert the Propriety of them, that *his Fleſh is Meat indeed, and his Blood Drink indeed, that he who eateth the one and drinketh the other, dwelleth in him and liveth by him, but he that doth not, hath no Life in him.* But now theſe Words being ſpoken, you ſee, concerning the preſent Time, *My Fleſh is Meat indeed,* and ſo on, cannot principally relate to the Sacrament; for there was yet no ſuch Thing, nor till a Year or two after. Beſides; it is not true that he, and he only, who eateth the Sacrament, ſhall dwell in Chriſt and live by him. For Perſons may poſſibly have no Opportunity of receiving the Sacrament, and yet be very good Chriſtians, and too many receive it frequently, and yet are very bad Chriſtians. The Meaning therefore plainly is, that our Saviour's coming and ſuffering in the Fleſh, and ſhedding his Blood for Mankind, is the ſpiritual Life of the World: that whoever imbibes the Doctrine he taught in his Life, and partakes by Faith of the Benefits he procured at his Death, his Soul is inwardly ſtrengthened by them, and ſhall be finally preſerved to a happy Immortality. For in this ſpiritual and figurative Senſe he immediately directs his Diſciples to underſtand his

Words; when misunderstanding them in a gross and literal one had somewhat staggered them, *Doth this*, says he, *offend you? It is the Spirit that quickeneth: the Flesh profiteth nothing. The Words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are Life.* His Manner of Expression had the same Intent with that Passage of St. *Paul* [a], where he says, *the Israelites did all eat the same spiritual Meat, and did all drink the same spiritual Drink. For they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* The Papists themselves do not think from hence, that the *Jews* did eat and drink Christ literally: and Christians do it in the same Manner they did, only with a clearer and more distinct Faith. For in this spiritual Sense, Christ himself explains his Words; we firmly believe *His Body and Blood to be verily and indeed taken and received by the Faithful in the Lord's Supper*; that is, an Union with him, to be not only represented, but really and effectually communicated to the worthy Receiver. But as for any other Sense, if we did, or could do so monstrous a Thing, as literally to eat the Flesh, and drink the Blood of our dear Lord, it is not that which could do our Souls any Good,

[a] 1 Cor. x. 3, 4.

but

but only his Grace accompanying this Sacrament: which may as well accompany it without any Change of the Bread and Wine, as it accompanies that of Baptiſm, without any Change of the Water.

We ſee then that Scripture by no Means favours Tranſubſtantiation. It is indeed expreſs againſt it. For St. *Paul* more than once tells us, that what we eat in the Sacrament is *Bread*, and as for what we drink, when our Saviour ſays, *this is my Blood which is ſhed for you*, if he had meant literally, he had ſpoke falſely: for his Blood was not ſhed till afterwards, and could not be drank then. Neither is it in a Condition of being ſhed at preſent, and therefore cannot be drank now. But too much hath been ſaid of this monſtrous Doctrine, to which the Indiſcretion of well-meaning Writers gave the firſt Occaſion pretty early, whilſt they affected to heighten the figurative Expreſſions of Scripture, by ſtill more figurative ones of their own; little thinking at the ſame Time, that ſuch an abſurd Meaning, as the Papiſts now plead for, could ever be aſcribed to them; and plainly ſhowing, by innumerable Proofs, that it is unjuſtly aſcribed to them. But as Ignorance and Superſtition increaſed, about 800 Years after

Chriſt this amazing Notion began to be diſtinctly, and explicitly entertained and aſſerted, which ſome had the good Senſe to oppoſe; ſome the Weakneſs to receive, as a Myſtery that promoted the Reverence of the Sacrament; others the Wickedneſs to ſupport with Zeal, as an Artifice that increaſed the Authority of the Prieſt: for what could he not do, who, as they blaſphemouſly expreſs it, could make God? By Degrees then this Doctrine prevailed; till, in the 13th Century, it was eſtabliſhed as an Article of Faith. And when once the ſpeculative Error, of believing the conſecrated Bread and Wine to be literally the Body and Blood of Chriſt, obtained, the practical one of worſhipping them as ſuch, quickly followed. For though a decent Reſpect was always paid to the Sacrament, yet a direct Adoration to the Elements was never paid, till the dark and ſuperſtitious Ages abovementioned introduced ſo ſenſeleſs an Idolatry, to the infinite Scandal of Religion. May God, who mercifully winked at the Times of Heathen Ignorance, overlook this leſs excuſable Folly of Chriſtians, and *forgive them, for they know not what they do.* But let us all remember, that our Caſe will be much worſe

than theirs, if, after the Light hath ſo clearly ſhone upon us, we return to Darkneſs again: if, as the Apoſtle expreſſes it, *we change the Truth of God into a Lie, and worſhip the Creature inſtead of the Creator, who is bleſſed for evermore* [a]. *Amen.*

[a] Rom. i. 25.

SER-

SERMON XIV.

1 PET. v. 12.

—*Exhorting and teſtifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.*

HAVING propoſed from theſe Words, firſt, to ſhow what is the Rule of Chriſtian Faith and Practice; and, ſecondly, to examine by this Rule the chief Differences between the Church of *Rome* and ours: the former Head I have finiſhed, and made ſome Progreſs in the latter. The Honour paid by them to Saints and Images, the Doctrine of Tranſubſtantiation, and the Worſhip built upon it of the Sacramental Bread and Wine, have been conſidered: and now I proceed to another Peculiarity of theirs, with Reſpect to the Sacrament, withholding the Cup from the Laity. That our Saviour adminiſtered the Holy Euchariſt in both Kinds, they acknowledge: nay, that

that he expreſsly commanded thoſe, to whom he adminiſtered it, that they ſhould *all drink of that Cup*. What therefore he commands all to do, why do they forbid all but the Prieſt to do? Why; the Apoſtles, they ſay, were commanded to take the Cup as well as the Bread, becauſe they were Clergy. But the Church of *Rome* forbids even the Clergy, excepting thoſe who officiate, to take it. Beſides, if the Command of receiving the *Cup* relates only to the Clergy, that of receiving the *Bread* too, muſt relate only to the Clergy: for there is no Manner of Diſtinction made in the Goſpel. Yet they own the Laity are obliged by our Saviour's Command to receive the Bread, and therefore they are obliged by the ſame Command, to receive the Cup: which that they did accordingly, the eleventh Chapter of the firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, makes as plain as Words can make any Thing. Not to ſay further, that if the ſixth of St. *John* relate immediately to the Sacrament, as they are ſometimes very poſitive it doth, the fifty-third Verſe of that Chapter expreſsly declares, that, unleſs we *drink the Blood of the Son of Man*, as well *as eat his Fleſh*, we *have no Life in us*.

But

But they tell us, our Saviour himſelf, after his Reſurrection, adminiſtered the Sacrament in one Kind only. For St. *Luke* ſays, that ſitting down to eat with the two Diſciples at *Emmaus*, *He took Bread and bleſſed it, and brake, and gave to them:* and, upon their knowing him, *vaniſhed out of their Sight*[a]. Now it happens, that this was not adminiſtering the Sacrament at all, but doing juſt the ſame Thing, which the Evangeliſts, in juſt the ſame Words tell us he did, when he fed the Multitudes with the Loaves and Fiſhes; and indeed at every Meal he eat. For the *Jews* in the Beginning of every Meal of theirs, uſe the very ſame Cuſtom to this Day[b]. But they further plead, that however that be, at leaſt when in the Acts of the Apoſtles it is ſaid, the *Diſciples met together to break Bread on the firſt Day of the Week*[c]: this muſt be the Sacrament; and the Cup is not once mentioned there as given. We anſwer, 'tis not certain that even this was the Sacrament: and ſuppoſing it was, as, in Scripture-language, common Feaſts are expreſſed by the ſingle Phraſe of eating Bread, which yet ſurely does not prove, that the Gueſts drank nothing,

[a] Luke xxiv. 30, 31. [b] *Buxtorf.* Synag. Jud. c. 12.
[c] Acts xx. 7.

ſo

ſo neither is it proved, by a religious Feaſt being expreſſed in the ſame Manner. And beſides, if there is no Mention there of the Laity's receiving the Cup, there is none of the Prieſt's receiving it neither: yet this they think abſolutely neceſſary: and if one may be taken for granted, without being mentioned, the other may. Nor ſhould it be forgotten on this Occaſion, that as the Phraſe of eating ſometimes comprehends the whole of this Action, ſo doth that of drinking: *we have all been made to drink into one Spirit*, ſays the Apoſtle [d]; who hence proves the Unity of all Chriſtians, and therefore certainly thought it was the Right of all Chriſtians [e]. But they plead farther, that the Laity, by receiving the Body of Chriſt, receive his Blood alſo: for the Blood is contained in the Body. But here they quite forget, that our Saviour hath appointed this Sacrament to be received for a Memorial of his Blood's being ſhed out of his Body, of which, they who receive not the Cup, do not make the Memorial which he commanded, when he ſaid, *Drink ye all of this.* Still they inſiſt, that there being no peculiar Virtue or Benefit annexed to this Part of the Sacrament that they with-hold,

[d] 1 Cor. xii. 13. [e] *Claget*, Vol. i. Serm. x. p. 265.

which

which does not belong to the other, 'tis no Manner of Loſs to the Laity to omit it. Now does not the ſame Reaſon prove equally, that the Clergy may omit it too? But beſides, what Treatment of our bleſſed Lord is this, when he hath appointed all Chriſtians to perform a ſolemn Act of Religion, conſiſting of two Parts, both with equal Strictneſs enjoined; for the Church of *Rome* to ſay that one of them, the far greateſt Part of Chriſtians ſhall not perform, for 'tis full as well let alone: nay better indeed, if we believe them: for the Cup they tell us, may be drank of immoderately, may be ſpilled, many dreadful Inconveniences may happen from truſting it with the Laity? Now 'tis ſtrange our Saviour ſhould not be wiſe enough to foreſee theſe Inconveniences: 'tis ſtrange we ſhould not experience them neither: and it adds to the Wonder not a little, that the whole Church of Chriſt, for 1200 Years, ſhould not be able to find them out any more than we. For, in all that Time, the Cup was conſtantly given to the Laity in their public Communions, though there are ſome Inſtances, yet neither many, nor early ones, in which the Bread alone was carried to private Houſes. And when ſome of the Laity, for abſurd Reaſons, refuſed to take the Cup,

Cup, no leſs than three Popes condemned them. But ſuperſtitious Imaginations gradually increaſing amongſt Chriſtians, a Cuſtom aroſe firſt of giving the Bread dipt in Wine inſtead of both ſeparate, and at laſt in the 15th Century the Council of *Conſtance*, the ſame which decreed ſo honeſtly, that Promiſes made to the Prejudice of the Catholic Faith ought not to be kept[f], decreed alſo very modeſtly, that notwithſtanding (for ſo they expreſs it) our Saviour adminiſtered both Kinds, one only ſhall be adminiſtered for the future to the Laity. And now it is made an Article of their Creed, that the whole Sacrament is given by giving this Part: ſo that whoever ſhall ſay both are neceſſary, (which, if it be not a Truth, one ſhould think could not be a Hereſy) is by the Council of *Trent* pronounced accurſed.

Another Difference between the Church of *Rome* and ours with Reſpect to the Sacrament is this. They hold that, as often as it is celebrated, Chriſt is truly and properly offered up a Sacrifice for our Sins. Now we acknowledge, that every Act of Obedience and of Worſhip more eſpecially, may, agreeably to the Language of Scripture, be ſpoken of as a Sacrifice

[f] See *Courayer*'s Council of *Trent*, Vol. i. p. 595.

to

to our Maker: that his Creatures of Bread and Wine, when appropriated to this ſolemn Act of Religion, are ſo far Offerings to God: and that this whole Act, being a Memorial and Repreſentation of the Sacrifice of Chriſt, may fitly enough be called by the ſame Name with what it commemorates and repreſents: ſo that in this Senſe Chriſtians have an Altar and an Offering upon it. But that, inſtead of a repreſentative Sacrifice of Praiſe, it ſhould be a real Sacrifice of Atonement, in which Chriſt's Body, literally ſpeaking, is every Day offered up anew, of this we can ſee neither Proof nor Poſſibility. For not only it ſuppoſes Tranſubſtantiation to be true, which hath been proved to be falſe; but it is abſolutely inconſiſtent with two whole Chapters of the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*; the ninth and tenth; which throughout inculcate that *Chriſt was not to be offered up often, for then muſt he often have ſuffered; but that he appeared once to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himſelf; was once offered to bear the Sins of many; and by this one Offering hath for ever perfected them that are ſanctified.* If therefore our Doctrine be heretical in this Point, St. *Paul*'s is ſo too: not to ſpeak of the primitive Chriſtians; who, though they often called this

Ordinance a Sacrifice, yet, by calling it an unbloody one, ſhew they did not think the Blood of Chriſt was literally offered up in it; and by frequently ſaying they had indeed no Sacrifices, prove themſelves to look on this only as a figurative one.

But now from this Notion of a daily Atonement thus made, I ſhall proceed to their other Doctrines concerning the Forgiveneſs of Sins. And here they hold, that a particular Abſolution from a Prieſt is neceſſary, if it can be had, for the Pardon of every mortal Sin, *i. e.* every Sin by which any Perſon without Repentance forfeits his Title to Heaven: and that a particular Confeſſion of every material Circumſtance of every ſuch Sin, is neceſſary for Abſolution. And the Practice of theſe Things they apprehend to give their Church an unſpeakable Advantage over ours.

The Neceſſity of ſuch Abſolution they plead for from our Saviour's Words to his Apoſtles: *Whatſoever ye ſhall bind on Earth, ſhall be bound in Heaven: and whatſoever ye ſhall looſe on Earth, ſhall be looſed in Heaven*[e]. *Whoſeſoever Sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whoſeſoever Sins ye retain, they are retained*[f]. Now cer-

[e] Matt. xviii. 18. [f] John xx. 23.

tainly

tainly these Words did not put it in the Power of the Apostles themselves, to pardon or refuse to pardon whom they pleased, right or wrong. They could use the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven no further, than he saw fit, *who openeth, and no Man shutteth: who shutteth, and no Man openeth* [g]. Yet the Apostles had great Powers by Virtue of these Words, which we have not: the Power of discerning by the Spirit, in many Cases at least, and therefore of declaring, who were penitent and pardoned, who otherwise: the Power of inflicting and continuing miraculous Punishments on wicked Persons, which is *binding and retaining* their Sins; and of removing such Punishments, which is *loosing and remitting* them. But these Things the *Romish* Clergy can no more claim than we. What then besides can there be conveyed by these Words of our Lord? A Power of preaching that Gospel, according to the Terms of which alone, the Sins of Men shall be forgiven or punished; a Power of admitting Persons into a State of Forgiveness by Baptism, of administering to them the Word of God and the holy Sacrament, as Means of Grace; of denouncing his Wrath against all Sinners, interceding with

[g] Rev. iii. 7.

him for all Penitents, and pronouncing in his Name that he pardons and abſolves them. Theſe Things, we truſt, are done much more faithfully by us than them. There is indeed another Power, of exerciſing ſpiritual Diſcipline, for the Honour of the Church and the Sake of Example, to diſtinguiſh ſo far as Men are able between the good, by admitting them to Communion with us, and the bad, by excluding them from it. In this we acknowledge that we are deficient: but they are worſe: for they have utterly perverted it from a public Inſtitution of general Uſe and Influence, to a ſecret Tranſaction between a Sinner and his Confeſſor, in which not only ſuch Abſolution is made neceſſary, as the Scripture hath no where required, but ſuch Confeſſion inſiſted on as is no Way needful to it. Not needful from any Command of God: for the chief and almoſt only Text they plead for that Purpoſe, *Confeſs your Faults one to another* [h], no more obliges the People in all Caſes to reveal the Particulars of their Sins to the Prieſt, than the Prieſt to reveal the Particulars of his to the People. Nor is it needful from the Nature of the Thing: for it is not knowing a Perſon's Sins that can qualify the

[h] James v. 16.

Prieſt

Prieſt to give him Abſolution, but knowing he hath repented of them: which is juſt as poſſible to be known without a particular Confeſſion, as with it.

Still in many Caſes acknowledging the Errors of our Lives, and opening the State of our Souls to the Miniſters of God's Word, for their Opinion, their Advice, and their Prayers, may be extremely uſeful, ſometimes neceſſary. And whenever Perſons think it ſo, we are ready both to hear them with the utmoſt Secreſy, and to aſſiſt them with our beſt Care: to direct them how they may be forgiven, if we think they are not; to pronounce them forgiven, if we think they are. Only we muſt beg them to remember, that none but God can pardon Sins as to their Conſequences in another World. Men indeed may take off from Sinners the Cenſures of the Church if they have incurred them; but as to any Thing farther, all we can do is either to pray to God that he would forgive them, (which was the only Form of Abſolution till the eleventh Century at leaſt) or elſe to declare that he hath done ſo. And let ſuch a Declaration expreſs ever ſo poſitively that either God or the Prieſt abſolves them, it is a fatal Error to build Hopes on this, with Reſpect to

another Life, any further than conditionally, that if their Repentance be ſufficient, their Forgiveneſs is certain. But whether it be ſufficient or no, the Prieſts of our Church can give their Judgement, and thoſe of the Church of *Rome* can poſſibly do no more. For they muſt own themſelves to be as fallible as we are.

But as neither Reaſon nor Scripture makes Confeſſion and Abſolution of this Kind neceſſary, ſo neither did the primitive Church hold it to be ſo. Public Confeſſion indeed they required in Caſes of public Scandal: but for private Confeſſion in all Caſes, it was never thought of as a Command of God for 900 Years after Chriſt; nor determined to be ſuch till after 1200: when the ſame Council of *Lateran* decreed it, which decreed alſo the depoſing of ſuch Princes as would not extirpate Hereſy. And yet it is amazing what Streſs they now lay upon it. No Repentance, they tell us, will avail, if it be neglected: and almoſt any will do, if it be obſerved. For let a dying Sinner have only what they call Attrition, ſuch a Sorrow as ariſes merely from the Fear of being puniſhed without the leaſt Degree of Diſlike to Sin or Love to God, this Sorrow, though not ſufficient without Abſolution, yet, with it, is. So that if

a Perſon who hath diſregarded God all his Life, can but be made afraid of him at his Death, the Prieſt ſhall deliver him from Hell, and ſecure Heaven to him, by a Word ſpeaking. Some leſſer Puniſhments indeed he doth remain ſubject to firſt: as to which however there are Ways of making Matters as eaſy as can well be wiſhed. But in order to underſtand them, another Head of *Popiſh* Doctrine muſt be explained.

Our Saviour, they tell us, having procured for repenting Sinners the Forgiveneſs only of the eternal Puniſhment due to their Sins, there remains a temporal Puniſhment due to them ſtill, which, if it be not in this Life either inflicted by worldly Sufferings, or ſatisfied for by good Works and Penances, muſt be undergone after Death, in the Pains of a Place called *Purgatory:* which Pains may, however, be mitigated and ſhortened, partly by offering up Prayers for ſuch Perſons, and partly by granting Indulgences to them. And theſe Things alſo we are Heretics for not believing. Yet for the Neceſſity of our believing theſe Doctrines, they pretend no Scripture-Proof, and they have no Proof for ſo much as the Truth of them. Heaven and Hell we read of perpetually in the Bi-

ble, but Purgatory we never meet with: though ſurely, if there be ſuch a Place, Chriſt and his Apoſtles would not have concealed it from us. St. *Paul* indeed mentions, *a Fire that tries every Man's Works, and Perſons that ſhall be ſaved, yet ſo as by Fire*[i]. But what is he there ſpeaking of? He had been laying amongſt them, he ſays, the Foundation of Religion, the Acknowledgement of Jeſus Chriſt. *On this*, ſays he, *another Man hath built: but let every Man take Heed how he buildeth*; what he teaches for Chriſtian Doctrine: *for the Day ſhall declare it, and the Fire ſhall try every Man's Work of what Sort it is:* either the Day of the fiery Trial of Perſecution, or rather, the final Judgement of God, *whoſe Day ſhall burn like an Oven*[k], this ſhall try every Man's Work, ſearch it as thoroughly as Fire does Things that are put into it. Then, *if any Man's Work which he hath built, abide*, if the Doctrines he hath taught bear the Teſt, *he ſhall receive a Reward:* but, *if his Work be burnt*, if, preſerving the Fundamentals of Chriſtianity, he hath built Errors on them, *he ſhall ſuffer Loſs*; the Pains he hath taken ſhall be of no Benefit, and though he may be ſaved himſelf, it ſhall be like one that eſ-

[i] 1 Cor. iii. 13, 15. [k] Mal. iv. 1.

capes

capes through the Fire, with great Danger and Difficulty. For ſo St. *Jude* ſpeaks: *Some ſave with Fear, pulling them out of the Fire*[l]: and the Prophet *Amos*, *Ye were as a Firebrand plucked out of the burning*[m]. This Paſſage therefore relates not to puniſhing, in Purgatory, the Perſons of ſome Men, before the Day of Judgement, but to trying the Works of all Men at the Day of Judgement: and, far from patronizing the Church of *Rome*, gives them indeed an awful Warning not *to build on the Foundation* of Chriſtianity *Hay and Stubble*; ſuch uſeleſs Traſh as this, and many other of their Doctrines; which that great Day of the Lord will ſhow to have no Solidity in them: but *their Works ſhall be burnt up, themſelves ſuffer Loſs, and at beſt be ſaved only ſo as by Fire.* Their other Texts for Purgatory are, if poſſible, leſs to the Purpoſe than this: that *Blaſphemy againſt the Holy Ghoſt ſhall not be forgiven, either in this Life or that to come*[n]; which is only ſaying, it ſhall never be forgiven, but puniſhed both here and hereafter: that he who *agrees not with his Adverſary in the Way, ſhall be caſt by the Judge into Priſon, and not come out till*

[l] Jude, ver. 23. [m] Amos. iv. 11. [n] Matt. xii. 32.

he hath paid the uttermoſt Farthing [o]; which perhaps is only ſaying, that whoever doth not make up a Difference with his Neighbour before Trial, muſt expect no Favour after: Or, if God be the Judge meant, the Senſe will be, that the Perſon condemned ſhall never come out of Priſon, becauſe he can never *pay the uttermoſt Farthing*. For Uncharitableneſs unrepented of, which is the Crime here mentioned, the Papiſts themſelves own, ſends Men not to Purgatory, but to Hell. As for their Notion, that our Saviour hath not procured Forgiveneſs of the temporal Puniſhment of Sin, 'tis certain from Scripture, that he hath procured the Forgiveneſs of every Thing that can properly be called Puniſhment. For *his Blood cleanſeth us from all Sin* [p]; and therefore no Purgatory is needful. And *there is no Condemnation to them which are in Chriſt Jeſus* [q], and conſequently no ſuch Place to be condemned to. Correction indeed there is; but this Correction is the Work, not of an offended Judge, but a merciful Father: and as he, by theſe and many other Means endeavours to amend us, ſo we ſhould uſe all proper Means to amend ourſelves: but ſuch Penances as tend only to give Pain, are not proper Means even in

[o] Matt. v. 25, 26. [p] 1 John i. 7. [q] Rom. viii. 1.

this

this Life, which is our only Time of Amendment; much leſs will any ſuch be inflicted on good Men in the other, when they will come too late for any valuable Purpoſe. *Bleſſed*, ſays the Angel, *are the Dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth*, from the Hour of their Death, *for they reſt from their Labours*[r]. But miſerable, ſays the Church of *Rome*, are many of the Dead that die in the Lord, for a long Time after, for they reſt not from their Labours, but labour under moſt grievous Sufferings. But indeed, even their own apocryphal Scriptures might have taught them better than this. *The Souls of the Righteous are in the Hand of God, and there ſhall no Torment touch them*[s]. Nor is their Plea from Antiquity better than that from Scripture. For though many had adopted ſtrange Notions of theſe Things, out of Heathen Fable and Philoſophy, into the Chriſtian Religion, yet Purgatory, in the preſent Popiſh Senſe, was not heard of for 400 Years after Chriſt; nor univerſally received even in the Weſtern Churches for 1000 Years; nor almoſt in any other Church than that of *Rome*, to this Day. But ſuppoſing there were ſuch a Place, how do they know concerning any particular Perſon that he ever

[r] Rev. xiv. 13. [s] Wiſd. iii. 1.

comes

comes into it, or how long he ſtays in it? And if not, what is it but *offering the Sacrifice of Fools* [t], to make thouſands of Prayers for one, who may be quite out of the Reach of them, either in Heaven, or perhaps in Hell? Though indeed, by praying for the very wickedeſt of Men, as only in Purgatory, they ſtrongly tempt other wicked Men to conclude, that none of their Communion ever go to Hell. And thus is this Invention at once ſo great a Terror to good Perſons, and ſo great a Comfort to bad ones, that one cannot help applying to it the Prophet's Words: *With Lies ye have made the Heart of the Righteous ſad, whom I have not made ſad: and ſtrengthened the Hands of the Wicked, that he ſhould not return from his wicked Way, by promiſing him Life* [u]. But were they to pray not for particular Perſons, as they do, but only in general for all that are there; where is the Command, where is even the Permiſſion for it? Our Brethren on Earth we pray for, becauſe the Time of their Trial is not yet over. But the State of the Dead is fixed, and they ſhall receive, every Man, not according to our Prayers, but their own paſt Works. Purgatory, they tell us, is that Priſon whence Men ſhall

[t] Eccleſ. v. 1. [u] Ezek. xiii. 22.

not

not come out *till they have paid the laſt Farthing:* and what room is there then for our Prayers for them there? We own indeed, ſome Sort of Prayers for the Dead were uſed by the Church (tho' without any Warrant for them that appears) very early, within 200 Years after Chriſt. But then originally theſe were made, not for Souls in Purgatory, for whom the Papiſts pray, but for Saints in *Paradiſe,* for whom they do not pray; for all righteous Perſons deceaſed, Prophets, Apoſtles, Martyrs, even for the bleſſed Virgin herſelf: and hence it appears by the Way, that they did not pray to theſe ſince they prayed for them. And the Subject-matter of their Prayers was, that God would grant them his promiſed Mercy in the Day of Judgement, and ſpeedily complete their Happineſs in Body and Soul. In Proceſs of Time, it muſt be owned, Men fell into a Variety of groundleſs Suppoſitions, concerning the State of Chriſtians between Death and the Reſurrection; and upon theſe Suppoſitions they formed their Prayers, which many Perſons went ſo far as to imagine could benefit even Sinners in Hell. But as all theſe Suppoſitions, for a long Time, were different from, and inconſiſtent with, the *Romiſh* Notions of Purgatory, ſo the Prayers, which the Ancients

uſed

uſed for the Dead, even were they of Authority, (which they are not, for nothing is ſo but what appears to come from God) would condemn, and not juſtify thoſe Prayers which the Papiſts uſe.

Another Popiſh Method of relieving Sinners is by Indulgences. Originally this Word meant a very right Thing, the Mitigation of the Severity or Length of Eccleſiaſtical Cenſures towards ſuch, as, by an exemplary Repentance, had deſerved it. Nor was any other Sort of Indulgences known for at leaſt 600 Years, perhaps much longer. But the preſent Notion of the Church of *Rome* about them, (though in their Diſputes with us they would fain diſguiſe it if they could) is this. Many of the Saints, it ſeems, having not only done enough to merit immediate Entrance into Heaven, but more than was neceſſary for that Purpoſe, this Overplus of their Goodneſs, called uſually Works of Supererogation, joined with the infinite Merits of Chriſt, makes a Treaſure of ineſtimable Value, which the Church hath the Diſpoſal of, and the Pope, as Head of the Church, applies towards the Remiſſion of their Sins, who either fulfil in their Life-time certain Conditions appointed by him, or whoſe Friends will fulfil

them after their Deaths. Now we, on the contrary, have learnt from Scripture, that in many Things the beſt of us all offend; that, were our Obedience perfect, it were no more than our Duty; and that, to the Grace of God, not to the Merit of our Works, the Salvation of our Souls is owing. In ſome Reſpects indeed, in uſeleſs Mortifications and Obſervances of no Value, we acknowledge many Saints of their Church have done much more than God requires, much more than he approves or will reward. But even had they done more really good Things than they were obliged to, this might indeed increaſe their own Happineſs in another World: but what Pretence is there for affirming, that inſtead of that it ſhall be tranſferred away to the Benefit of others; and thoſe others, juſt whomſoever the Pope ſhall pleaſe? This ſure is very hard. But after all, what is the Benefit conferred by theſe Indulgences? If it be only Deliverance, either wholly, or in Part, from Purgatory; there is no ſuch Place to be delivered from. And that it is from Hell, they dare not ſay indeed, but they do every Thing that can make the ignorant think it. Why elſe are Chriſt's Merits mentioned as one Ground of Indulgences? For he hath not

merited,

merited, they tell us, Deliverance from temporary Puniſhments, as Purgatory is, but from eternal ones only. Why alſo do their Indulgences declare themſelves to beſtow the moſt full Remiſſion and Forgiveneſs of all Sins, if they mean only the ſmalleſt Part of Forgiveneſs? Theſe Things are too plainly calculated to deceive poor Wretches into a fatal Belief, that, by ſuch Methods, Wickedneſs here may become conſiſtent with Happineſs hereafter. Repentance indeed is, in Words, made one Condition of obtaining theſe Indulgences: but this is eaſily explained away, or overlooked amongſt the others joined with it, of ſaying ſo many Prayers, going to ſo many Proceſſions, and paying ſo much Money. Nay, if their own Hiſtorians are to be credited, the Inhabitants of whole Cities at once, upon viſiting certain Churches, and paying a certain Sum, have before now been abſolved of all their Sins by the Pope, with theſe very Words added; *Even though they had not been contrite for them, nor confeſſed them.* But, as the Reformation was firſt brought on by the Enormities of Indulgences, ſo, ſince the Reformation, they have in many Places, both in this and other Reſpects, greatly moderated their Practices, though

though they have never effectually disclaimed their Principles. And indeed, as angry as they are with that happy Event, they have great Reason to be thankful for it, on Account of several Changes for the better, which it has produced amongst them, especially where Part of any Country have been Protestants. For elsewhere all their Abuses are kept up. And for one Proof of it, I have now in my Custody a plenary Indulgence granted for a small Piece of Gold at *Rome* this very Year [w] to an absolute Stranger, for himself, for his Kindred to the third Degree, and to thirty Persons more, for whose Names a proper Blank is left in the Instrument. So that had not the Reformation given them some Check, God knows whether by this Time Christianity had been discoverable under the Changes and Disguises which the prevailing Part of them would have deformed it with. Consider but to what Lengths Matters had already gone, in this one Article of the Remission of Sins. The Necessity of Confession put the Secrets of every Man's Heart and Life into the Breast of the Priest, and the Power of admitting into Heaven, or excluding from it, forced the bigotted Sinner to do whatever should

[w] 1745.

be enjoined him. In how monſtrous a Manner this Power was uſed, the Hiſtories of all Nations dreadfully ſhow. And then to preſerve it from growing quite intolerable, an Artifice was added that made it ſtill more fatal. It is too well known that Mankind will do any Thing rather than their Duty, and part with any Thing ſooner than their Vices. On the Terms therefore of ſubmitting in other Points, they were made eaſy in this favourite one. The ſtricteſt Rules of Life indeed were laid down for ſuch as thought themſelves bound to be ſtrict: but for thoſe, who deſired to be otherwiſe, ſuperſtitious Obſervances were allowed to take Place of real Duties; idle Penances to ſtand inſtead of true Repentance and Reformation: without a Zeal for ſuch Follies as theſe, the beſt Man was reckoned to have but ſmall Hope of future Happineſs; and with a Zeal for the Notions and Intereſts of holy Church, the worſt Man was eaſily ſecured from future Miſery. Abſolution, if he were but ever ſo little ſorry for having been a Sinner, would ſet him clear at once from Hell; and, if he had but either Time to perform a few ſilly Devotions and Mortifications while he lived, or Money to purchaſe a good many Prayers for him when he died,

died, his Confinement in Purgatory muſt ſoon be over: and thus was the Neceſſity of a holy Life quite taken away, and the Goſpel of Chriſt altogether made void. Far be it from us of this Church to affright you with ſuch vain Terrors, or deceive you with ſuch vain Hopes. On the contrary, be aſſured that were all the Prieſts on Earth to refuſe abſolving a true Penitent, it would never hurt him; and were they all to join in abſolving a Man that hath not repented as the Goſpel requires, it would do him no Good. Be aſſured that no Equivalent in the World will be accepted inſtead of true inward Piety, nor all the good Works of all the Saints in Heaven compenſate in the leaſt Degree for the Want of good Works in any one Man on Earth. Never be moved then by the moſt confident Pretences of this Kind, but know, for a Certainty, that whoever flies for Refuge from his Sins to thoſe who will flatter him with ſuch wretched Expedients as theſe; inſtead of mending his Condition by truſting to them, only makes it worſe and more deſperate than it was before. The Words of God in the Caſe of the *Iſraelites*, are juſt as applicable in this: *Becauſe ye have ſaid; we have made a Covenant with Death, and with Hell we are at Agreement;*

when the overflowing Scourge ſhall paſs through, it ſhall not come unto us, for we have made Lies our Refuge, and under Falſhood have we hid ourſelves: Therefore thus ſaith the Lord God— Your Covenant with Death ſhall be diſannulled, and your Agreement with Hell ſhall not ſtand: when the overflowing Scourge ſhall paſs through, then ſhall ye be trodden down by it. Judgement will I lay to the Line, and Righteouſneſs to the Plummet; and the Hail ſhall ſweep away the Refuge of Lies, and the Waters ſhall overflow the hiding Place[x].

Ye therefore, Beloved, to conclude with the Words of St. *Peter, ſeeing ye know theſe Things, beware leſt, being led away with the Error of the Wicked, ye fall from your own Stedfaſtneſs: But grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*[y]. To him be Glory both now and for ever. Amen.

[x] Iſ. xxviii. 15, 17, 18. [y] 2 Pet. iii. 17, 18.

SER-

SERMON XV.

1 PET. v. 12.

——*Exhorting and teſtifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.*

AFTER fixing the Rule of Chriſtian Faith and Practice, I proceeded to compare with this Rule the chief Things which diſtinguiſh the Church of *Rome* from ours. Great Numbers of theſe I have already conſidered, and ſhall now, for your fuller Satisfaction, go on to ſome others.

Several of their Notions concerning the Pardon of Sin I have mentioned and confuted; but there ſtill remains one more to be ſpoken of: their Cuſtom, when a ſick Perſon is near Death, of anointing his Eyes, and Ears, and Noſtrils, and Mouth, and Hands, ſometimes alſo his Feet, and Reins, with Oil conſecrated by the

Biſhop, and praying, that in Virtue of that anointing, the Sins which he hath committed, by the ſeveral Organs of his Body, may be forgiven him. This they call *extreme Unction*, or the Sacrament of dying Perſons; and teach, that, beſides Forgiveneſs of Sins, it gives Compoſure and Strength of Mind to go through the Agonies of Death. All this they build wholly on the following Paſſage of St. *James*. *Is any ſick among you? Let him call for the Elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with Oil in the Name of the Lord. And the Prayer of Faith ſhall ſave the ſick, and the Lord ſhall raiſe him up; and if he have committed Sins, they ſhall be forgiven him*[a]. But a little Conſideration will ſhow that what St. *James* appoints is very different from what the Church of *Rome* does. In thoſe Days miraculous Gifts were common; that of healing Diſeaſes in particular: and the Perſons who had theſe Gifts were uſually the Elders of the Churches, whom the Apoſtle here directs to be ſent for. And as Miracles, in Condeſcenſion to the Genius of the *Jewiſh* People, to whom this Epiſtle is directed, were accompanied, for the moſt Part, with ſome outward Act

[a] James v. 14, 15.

of Ceremony, by the Performer of them; (a Practice which our Saviour himſelf often complied with;) ſo the Ceremony uſed in healing the ſick by Miracle, *viz.* anointing them with Oil, was one to which the *Jews* had been accuſtomed; Oil being a Thing of which much Uſe was made in the Eaſtern Countries, on many Occaſions [b]. Accordingly we read, that, when our Saviour ſent out his Diſciples with a Power from Heaven to cure Diſeaſes, though he preſcribed to them no particular Form for that Purpoſe, yet they adopted this; *they anointed with Oil many that were ſick, and healed them* [c]. Now what the Evangeliſt tells us they did, is evidently the very Thing which St. *James* directs the Elders of the Church to do. And therefore, ſince the anointing mentioned in the Goſpel was only a mere Circumſtance uſed in miraculous Cures; that alſo mentioned in the Epiſtles can be nothing more. Accordingly we find St. *James* neither appoints any Conſecration

[b] See *Wheatley* on the Office for the Sick. And *Grotius* on *Mark* vi. 13. ſays the *Jews* uſed it when they prayed for the Sick, to expreſs their Hope of obtaining from God in their Behalf that Joy and Gladneſs which Oil ſignifies. *Preſervative againſt Popery*, Tit. vii. c. ii. § iv. p. 62. [c] Mark vi. 13. The Council of *Trent* had at firſt ſaid, that extreme Unction was *inſtituted* in this Place, but afterwards changed that Word for *inſinuated*. *F. Paul* in *Preſerv.* p. 64.

of the Oil, nor aſcribes any Efficacy to it, as the Papiſts do: but ſays, *the Prayer of Faith ſhall ſave the Sick.* Now if this means only Prayer offered up in a general Faith of God's Providence, we uſe it for the Sick as well as they, and may hope for the ſame good Effect from it. But Faith, in many Places of Scripture, ſignifies that ſupernatural Perſuaſion and Feeling of a Power to work Miracles, which in thoſe Days was frequent. Thus St. *Paul* ſays, *though I had all Faith, ſo that I could remove Mountains* [d], &c. And therefore *the Prayer of Faith*, ſince it is ſo abſolutely promiſed here that it *ſhall ſave the Sick*, probably means, a Prayer proceeding from this extraordinary Perſuaſion and Impulſe: ſuch a one as, in the next Verſe, we tranſlate *an effectual fervent Prayer*, but ſhould tranſlate an *inwrought* or *inſpired Prayer*. And therefore unleſs, in the Church of *Rome*, the Prieſt, as often as he adminiſters extreme Unction, acts and prays by immediate Inſpiration, his Prayers are not of the Sort St. *James* ſpeaks of; nor are they directed to the ſame End. The Benefit, which he promiſes from the Prayers that he appoints, is the Recovery of Health: *The Prayer of Faith ſhall*

[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 2. See alſo Matt. xvii. 20. John xiv. 12, 13.

ſave

ſave the Sick, and the Lord ſhall raiſe him up: whereas they of the Church of *Rome* never uſe this Ceremony with any Hope of Recovery, nor indeed, unleſs they happen to miſtake, till the Perſon is quite paſt Recovery. And, for this Reaſon again, His anointing and theirs are quite different Things. For though St. *James* does add; *And, if he have committed Sins, they ſhall be forgiven him*; yet the very Doubt, implied in the Word *if*, ſhews, he is not ſpeaking of a Sacrament inſtituted purpoſely for the Remiſſion of Sins, as the Church of *Rome* make their Unction to be. And indeed this relates to the very ſame Thing with his former Words. For, as bodily Sickneſs and Infirmity was frequently a Puniſhment for Sin; (whence, to mention no other Proofs, St. *Paul* tells the *Corinthians*[e], *For this Cauſe many are weak and ſickly among you, and many ſleep*;) ſo, the very Form of miraculouſly healing a Perſon of theſe Infirmities, uſed by our Saviour is, *Son, thy Sins be forgiven thee*[f]: that is, the Illneſs inflicted on thee for thy Sins is removed. Since therefore St. *James* promiſes Forgiveneſs of Sins in juſt a like Caſe, we are certainly to underſtand him in juſt the like Senſe; *viz.* that, if the Sickneſs of any Perſon prayed for were

[e] 1 Cor. xi. 30. [f] Matt. ix. 2. See alſo John v. 14.

the

the Puniſhment of any Sin; that Puniſhment ſhould be remitted, and his Health reſtored. Now this Forgiveneſs of the temporal Puniſhment of ſome particular Sins, which is what St. *James* promiſes, the Church of *Rome* does not promiſe from this Ceremony; and the Forgiveneſs of the future Puniſhment of all thoſe Sins, that the ſick Perſon hath ever committed by his Bodily Organs, which St. *James* does not promiſe, they do. Though indeed it is a little hard to conceive, when all a Man's Sins have been already forgiven; (as they ſay they are, by the Prieſt's Abſolution) how any of them ſhould want to be forgiven again, perhaps by Extreme Unction, the Moment after. But the Truth is, they themſelves lay not near ſo much Streſs on this Ceremony's procuring Pardon of Sin, as its procuring Compoſure of Mind, againſt the Terrors of Death. Now moſt evidently this Expectation St. *James* hath not ſaid one Word to countenance: ſo that his Precept, which ſeems at firſt Sight to be ſome Ground for their Practice, and is the only Ground they have, relates indeed to a quite different Thing, as one of their Cardinals, *Cajetan*[s], acknowledges. Though the Council of *Trent*,

[s] *Preſervative*, Tit. vii. c. 2. §. 2. p. 60.

Seſſ.

Seff. 14. hath thought proper ſince to curſe all that ſhall ſay it. The anointing preſcribed by St. *James* therefore, being intirely of a miraculous Nature, was in all Reaſon to ceaſe, when Miracles were no more. And accordingly the primitive Chriſtians, though they ſpeak more than once of anointing with Oil in miraculous Cures; yet, in common Caſes, never mention it as a Cuſtom, much leſs as one appointed in Scripture, for the firſt 600 Years [h]. After that indeed, they came to uſe it upon all ſick Perſons in the beginning of Sickneſs, for a Means of Recovery, as the *Greek* Church doth yet; till finding it of little Benefit in that Way, the Church of *Rome*, about the twelfth Century, began to uſe it, in the Extremity of Sickneſs, as a Sacrament of Preparation for Death: which if it were in Reality, they are ſurely much to blame for not giving it under the Apprehenſions of an approaching violent Death; for Inſtance, before a Malefactor is executed; where it cannot but be as needful, as in the Fears of a natural one. Upon the whole, you ſee our laying aſide a Ceremony which hath long been uſeleſs, and, by leading Perſons into ſuperſtitious Fancies, might be hurtful, can be no Manner of Loſs, whilſt

[h] Concerning a Paſſage of *Innocent* I. in the Beginning of the 5th Century. See *Preſerv.* p. 75.

every

every Thing that continues truly valuable in St. *James*'s Direction, is preſerved in our Office for viſiting the Sick: concerning which, I ſhall only add, that it is much to be wiſhed Men would ſo live in the Time of their Health, as to need the leaſt ſpiritual Aſſiſtance that is poſſible, in the Time of their Sickneſs: and that what they do need, they would all apply for early, when it might be of great Benefit to them, and not content themſelves with calling in the Miniſter at laſt for mere Form's Sake, when he can do them little Good, or none.

Another Point, in which we differ from the Church of *Rome*, is, that all their public Prayers are in the *Latin* Tongue, ours in our own. This ſure at leaſt is no Hereſy, that, when we pray to God, we all know what we ſay. Our Practice juſtifies itſelf. But how is their's juſtified? Reaſon and common Senſe plainly condemn it. Antiquity is no leſs againſt them: for every Chriſtian Church originally had their own Service in their own Tongue. That of the Weſtern World was in *Latin*, only becauſe *Latin* was their common Language: and therefore, it ſhould have been no longer in *Latin*, when that ceaſed to be their common Language. And for Scripture, read but the 14th Chap. of

1 *Co-*

Corinthians, and ſee, what St. *Paul* would have judged of this *Romiſh* Practice. Even when there was a miraculous Gift of Tongues in the Church, and Men prayed, or prophefied in ſtrange Languages by Inſpiration; even then he requires ſuch Perſons to keep Silence, unleſs another were ready to interpret publicly what they ſpoke: for ſays he, *Brethren——Except ye utter Words eaſy to be underſtood, how ſhall it be known what is ſpoken? for ye ſhall ſpeak into the Air. If I know not the Meaning of the Voice, I ſhall be unto him that ſpeaketh a Barbarian, and he that ſpeaketh, ſhall be a Barbarian unto me. How ſhall he that occupieth the Room of the Unlearned ſay Amen, at thy giving of Thanks, ſeeing he underſtandeth not what thou ſayeſt? I thank my God I ſpeak with Tongues more than you all: yet in the Church, I had rather ſpeak five Words with my Underſtanding, that by my Voice I might teach others alſo, than ten Thouſand Words in an unknown Tongue.* It immediately follows, and very fitly to the preſent Purpoſe: *Brethren, be not Children in Underſtanding: howbeit in Malice be ye Children, but in Underſtanding be Men.* For never ſure was greater *Childiſhneſs*, than to be ſatisfied with the mere outward Show of Prayers to God, perhaps

haps without underſtanding one Word of them, which is not praying at all; nor greater *Malice*, that is, more wicked and cruel Cunning, than to keep the poor People in this Darkneſs, and plead for it with ſuch unfair Pretences as they do. Some of them tell us very gravely, that *Latin*, far from being an unknown Tongue, is the beſt known of any in *Europe*. And if it were; yet if this beſt known Tongue is notwithſtanding unknown to ninety-nine Perſons in a hundred, why muſt they all be confined to it, and not have each their own Prayers in their own Tongue? Why, that Variety would be very inconvenient, they ſay, to Travellers. But whoſe Convenience is moſt to be conſulted? That of whole Nations, or of a few Perſons that come amongſt them occaſionally? But vulgar Tongues, they ſay, are perpetually changing, and Expreſſions growing improper and unintelligible. I anſwer: our having our Bible and Prayer-Book, in the vulgar Tongue, undoubtedly prevents its changing near ſo faſt as it would otherwiſe. But when it does change, let them, where it is needful, be changed to it. For which is worſe, to take this little Trouble of altering a few Words and Phraſes once in a hundred Years, or to let People go on for Ages together,

together, with Prayers and Leſſons, of which they underſtand not one Word? But they alledge farther, that ſome of their Prayers, indeed a great Part of the Maſs, it would be uſeleſs to have ſaid in their own Language; for the Prieſt is ordered to ſpeak it ſo low, that it cannot be heard: as if one Fault would excuſe another, inſtead of making it greater. But many of their Prayers, they ſay, may be underſtood: for though ſpoken in *Latin*, there are printed Tranſlations of them in *Engliſh*. But ſtill, great Part of them is not tranſlated, unleſs it be by ſome very modern Indulgence[i]: and that which is, nothing but our making them aſhamed of themſelves hath forced them to of late in theſe Parts of the World againſt their Will. For we know that when, within this laſt Century, ſome well meaning Biſhops of their own Church in *France*, had publiſhed the Maſs in the vulgar Tongue, for the People's Uſe; the then Pope declared them Sons of Perdition to all the World, and condemned what they had done, as if it were the Overthrow of Religion[k]. So that, for ought

[i] The *Engliſh* Tranſlator of the Order and Canon of the Maſs, hath omitted many of the Ceremonies, particularly above twenty Croſſes out of leſs than thirty. *Tenſon* on Idol. p. 5.

[k] Tillotſon, Serm. 246.

we

we know, the ſame Liberty taken here may fall under the ſame Condemnation, when a proper Time comes. Or were the contrary ever ſo certain, ſtill putting their Prayers into *Engliſh* for the People, only ſhows that they ought to be ſpoken in *Engliſh* by the Prieſt: for this round-about Way is evidently a moſt abſurd one; that he ſhould be praying in one Language, and they following him by Gueſs, as well as they can, in another. Beſides, Multitudes of their poor People have never heard of theſe Tranſlations, or at leaſt, have them not: Multitudes more are unable to read them: and all theſe muſt be left quite in the Dark. But we are told, they have a good Intention in general: they reverence what they do not underſtand, and this is ſufficient. Now for the Purpoſes of ſpiritual Dominion, this may be ſufficient: and ſuch Devotions, as many of theirs are, will, we own, be more reverenced for not being underſtood. But for the Edification of the People, it is far from being ſufficient, to have good Intentions in general, and no Meaning in particular: to pray to God for they know not what; and hear Leſſons read, which they can learn nothing from.

Another

Another Thing, akin to the former, in which we differ from the Church of *Rome*, is, that we allow and exhort all Perſons to read the holy Scriptures diligently. They, on the contrary, have expreſsly decreed, that, ſince the promiſcuous Allowance of Bibles in the Vulgar Tongue does more Harm than Good, (theſe are the very Words of the Index publiſhed in Conſequence of the Council of *Trent*'s Order,) no one ſhall be ſuffered to read Tranſlations of Scripture, even though made by Catholics, as they call themſelves, unleſs the Biſhop or Inquiſitor, by the Advice of the Curate or Confeſſor, give him Leave in writing: and whoever tranſgreſſes this Rule, ſhall not be abſolved till he gives up his Bible. Nay, throughout the whole Kingdom of *Spain*, all Bibles in their own Tongue are abſolutely forbidden. And in all Popiſh Countries, getting one, by the Means here preſcribed, being a Matter of Time, and Form, and Difficulty, and Suſpicion, the Generality ſeldom put themſelves to the Trouble of it. So that in many Parts of the World there are great Multitudes of that Communion, who perhaps have never either read or heard in their own Tongue one Chapter of the Bible in their whole Lives. Or if any one does aſk for

Leave, it is never granted, where they dare refuſe it, excepting to ſuch as they are well aſſured beforehand will ſee nothing there but what they are bidden. So that where they have Permiſſion to read the Scripture, they have none to underſtand it. Beſides that, this Permiſſion, even in thoſe Countries where they are obliged to indulge it the moſt freely, as in our own, is but during Pleaſure, and may at any Time be taken away when it will ſerve the Turn better: nor dare the poor deluded People, upon Pain of Damnation, help themſelves. And as to Proteſtant Tranſlations, having one is looked on as a Mark of Hereſy; for which, in this very Nation, poor Creatures have been burnt, and their Bibles with them. Which Practice now, think you, is the righter, theirs or ours? What Authority can there be on Earth to forbid any Part of Mankind from reading what Heaven hath revealed to them? 'Tis the Law of our Lives, the Foundation of our Hopes; God hath given it to us, and Man hath no right to take it from us. But they tell us, it is from Kindneſs they do it: for there is great Danger that the Scripture may be miſunderſtood and perverted: *unlearned and unſtable Men*[1], St. *Peter* hath de-

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 16.

clared,

clared, *may wreſt it to their own Deſtruction.* Now this is poſſible indeed: and ſo it is poſſible every Thing may be applied to an ill Purpoſe: Health, Strength, Food, Liberty, common Day-light: but is this a Reaſon for taking away any of them? It is poſſible that Perſons may do themſelves Harm by having the Scriptures: but is it not ſomething more than poſſible, that they may ſuffer Harm from the Want of them; and *be deſtroyed,* as the Prophet tells us, *for lack of Knowledge*[m]? Why do not theſe Perſons, who are ſo very cautious in this Caſe, ſhow the ſame Caution in others, which ſurely need it full as much? Why do they never reſtrain any Body from Image Worſhip, for Fear of their falling into Idolatry? Why do they never forbid the Uſe of Indulgences, for Fear of their being miſtaken for a Licence to Sin? Multitudes of Queſtions like theſe might be with equal Reaſon aſked; and it is very ſtrange, methinks, that they ſhould be ſuſpicious of nothing doing Harm but the Bible. But after all, is the Danger ſo very great? Hath God Almighty inſpired Men to write and publiſh ſo exceedingly unſafe a Book, and ſo very unfit to be read by the Generality of thoſe, for whom he

[m] Hoſ. iv. 6.

intended it; that had not the Church of *Rome*, in their great Wiſdom, forbidden Perſons to look into it, without their Leave, it might have done infinite Harm, and does not a little ſtill? We cannot think ſo. Men were liable to make an ill Uſe of Things, to fall into Errors and Hereſies, in all Ages. Yet neither the Prophets under the Old Teſtament, nor our Saviour and his Apoſtles in the Times of the New, ever bethought themſelves of this Way for preventing it; but recommend and enjoin the reading of Scripture in the ſtrongeſt Terms. Now it is wonderful they ſhould not be as wiſe as thoſe who come after them. St. *Peter* himſelf, who mentions this Danger of Men's *wreſting the Scriptures*, yet does not in the leaſt blame, but ſuppoſe, every Man's reading them notwithſtanding. And St. *Paul*, whoſe Epiſtles were the very Scriptures they wreſted, yet never requires them to be kept from any one Chriſtian of the ſeveral Churches he writes to; nay, moſt ſtrictly requires the contrary, concerning an Epiſtle as liable to be miſunderſtood as any of them all; and which actually was miſunderſtood immediately, I mean his firſt Epiſtle to the *Theſſalonians*. Yet notwithſtanding that, *I charge you by the Lord*, ſays he, *that this Epiſtle*

be read unto all the holy Brethren [n]. Did then the ancient Chriſtians, in whoſe Days there were Hereſies in great Plenty, did they reſtrain any of the People from reading the Scriptures, in order to preſerve them from Hereſy? No: the *Romaniſts* do not pretend it. They well know, that a Man's delivering up his Bible was always, as it ought to be, the Mark of Apoſtaſy from Religion. They know there is no one Thing almoſt ſo much inſiſted on by Fathers and Councils as the Neceſſity that all Perſons without Exception ſhould be well acquainted with the Word of God. Thus little apprehenſive was the primitive Church of any Danger from this Practice. The Church of *Rome*, we own, has ſome Cauſe to be apprehenſive. For had the People once general Liberty to read and judge from Scripture, there is great Danger they might come in general to ſee, what now they who do ſee dare not own, how widely it differs from the Doctrines commonly taught them. We acknowledge then they are *wiſe in their Generation.* The Scripture is againſt them; and they will be againſt the Scripture: lower its Credit as far as they dare: keep it out of Men's Hands where they can: and where they

[n] 1 Theſſ. v. 27.

cannot, they pervert it by falſe Tranſlations, obſcure it by falſe Gloſſes, and *make it of none Effect* by ſetting up a pretended Authority of interpreting it to quite another Thing than it evidently means. We, God be thanked, need not theſe Arts, and we uſe them not. We permit, we beſeech, we require you all to read the Scriptures diligently, and judge of their Meaning impartially; to compare with them every Thing we teach you, and believe nothing but what you find agreeable to them. We have no Fear of your being poiſoned by the Food of Life, or led into Error by the Word of Truth. On the contrary we know not any ſurer Way of preſerving Men from Errors, and thoſe of the Church of *Rome* in particular, than that which St. *Paul* preſcribes *Timothy* in the third Chapter of his ſecond Epiſtle. *This know, that in the laſt Days perilous Times ſhall come. Evil Men and Seducers ſhall wax worſe and worſe, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in thoſe Things which thou haſt learned, and haſt been aſſured of: knowing of whom thou haſt learned them; and that from a Child thou haſt known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wiſe unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus. All Scripture is given by Inſpiration*

tion of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs, that the Man of God may be perfect, throughly furniſhed unto all good Works.

There are ſtill many other Points, in which great Corruptions of the *Romiſh* Church might be ſhown you. Such is their equalling the Apocryphal Books to the canonical: which the ancient Chriſtians did not. Such is their modern Addition of five new Sacraments to thoſe two which Chriſt appointed, and making the Belief of this preciſe Number eſſential to Salvation; making alſo the Prieſt's Intention ſo neceſſary to the Benefit of the Sacraments, that no Body ſhall be the better for them without it: a Perſon baptized, for Inſtance, ſhall be no Chriſtian notwithſtanding, if the Prieſt had Malice enough to deſign he ſhould not. Of the ſame bad Tendency is their burying every Part of Religion under a Load of Rites and Ceremonies, that turn it into outward Show; and giving it the Appearance of Art magic by an Infinity of abſurd Superſtitions, many of them the undeniable Remains of Heatheniſm very little diſguiſed: their engaging ſuch Multitudes of People in Vows of Celibacy and uſeleſs Retirement from the World: their obliging them to

ſilly Auſterities and Abſtinences of no real Value, as Matters of great Merit: their exceſſive Veneration of Relics, moſt of them fictitious and unfit to be thus honoured, were they ever ſo genuine: their Inventions of romantic Legends and lying Miracles, which make weak and unlearned Perſons believe any Things, and too many of thoſe, who ſee through them, believe nothing. And beſides theſe and other Errors in ſpiritual Matters, there are many more of moſt weighty Conſideration in Temporals, which they zealouſly maintain: their Claim of puniſhing whom they pleaſe to call Heretics with Penalties, Impriſonments, Tortures, Death; their excommunicating and depoſing Kings; their forbidding divine Worſhip through whole Nations at once; their annulling the moſt ſacred Promiſes and Engagements, when made to the Prejudice of their Church: their drawing, by wicked Artifices, the Wealth of all Countries to the Support of their own Tyranny. But many of theſe Things I have ſet in a proper Light to you on other Occaſions, and dwelling on all would be endleſs as well as unneceſſary. Enough, I hope, hath been ſaid, to ſhew you which are in the right: and that *this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.* For obſerve:

as

as the whole Claim of the Church of *Rome* depends upon her being in all Points infallible: ſo, if in any ſingle Point ſhe proves to be miſtaken, her Pretence of being believed in the reſt falls intirely to the Ground. But indeed, though for your fuller Satisfaction I have confuted many of her Doctrines, yet any Perſon may have ſufficient Satisfaction of his own being in the right Way, without ſo much as knowing or having heard what any one of her Doctrines is. For let him but keep cloſe to the Creed and the Commandments; believe thoſe Things which Scripture hath made neceſſary to be believed, and do thoſe Things which Scripture hath made neceſſary to be done; and he is under no Manner of Obligation to enquire, what any Church on Earth thinks fit to believe or do beſides. Many Opinions may be true and uſeful; many Practices may be innocent and edifying; but nothing can be Matter of Neceſſity, except what Chriſt and his Apoſtles have required as Terms of Salvation. Every Perſon, that complies with theſe, is a true Chriſtian: every Church that teaches theſe, is a true Church: and neither Ignorance nor Error about any other Matters can forfeit our Title to everlaſting Life. Search

then

then the Scriptures and ſee: is there any one Thing made neceſſary there which our Church forbids? Is there any one Thing declared ſinful there which our Church requires? If not, let other Churches prohibit or enjoin as they pleaſe at their own Peril. We are no Way bound to inquire what they do, or why. Letting alone their Peculiarities, we are ſure is ſafe. Whether making Uſe of them be or not, is their Buſineſs to conſider, not ours. So that were Tranſubſtantiation, for Inſtance, and Purgatory true; were the Worſhip of Images and praying to Saints lawful; which, God knows, they are far from being; yet as there is no Pretence that they are neceſſary Doctrines and Practices; the Miſtake of rejecting them could have no Harm in it; but the Uncharitableneſs of condemning and accurſing thoſe who reject them may have great Harm. For when once Chriſt hath ſaid, believe and do ſuch and ſuch Things, and you ſhall be ſaved; who is it that ſhall dare to ſay, believe and do more, or you ſhall not be ſaved? It is dreadful Arrogance, therefore, which the Church of *Rome* ſhows in this Reſpect; coining new Articles of Faith, ſome of which they own were not Articles of Faith from the Beginning, and ſentencing Men to Hell for not believing what,

what, before that Sentence, themſelves acknowledge no Body was bound to believe. This, you ſee, is changing the Terms of the Chriſtian Covenant arbitrarily, and making a new Goſpel at their own Pleaſure. But in Oppoſition to their Deciſions and *Anathemas*, hear one of St. *Paul: Though an Angel from Heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you than that which we*, the Apoſtles of Chriſt, *have preached, let him be accurſed.* Truſt then yourſelves on this Foot: for *other Foundation can no Man lay, than that which* they *laid* [o]. Nor indeed did the primitive Church, for ſeveral hundreds of Years, attempt it, or make any Doctrine neceſſary, which we do not: as the learned well know from their Writings; and the unlearned may know from the moſt ancient of their Creeds, which we now uſe in our conſtant Service. Afterwards indeed needleſs Additions firſt crept in, then falſe ones: but, had they begun ever ſo much ſooner, our Cauſe had received no Prejudice. *To the Law and to the Teſtimony*, as the Prophet directs, we appeal: *if they ſpeak not according to this Word, it is becauſe there is no Light in them* [p].

[o] 1 Cor. iii. 11. [p] Iſ. viii. 20.

SER-

SERMON XVI.

1 PET. v. 12.

——*Exhorting and teſtifying that this is the true Grace of God wherein ye ſtand.*

I COME now to conclude the Subject on which I have been ſo long employed. A ſufficient Number of the Doctrines of the *Romaniſts* have been conſidered, and what they plead for them, examined. But beſides the Pleas they make for each in particular, they have others for all in general. Should they, when they want to make a Convert, fairly propoſe to him each of their Notions ſeparately, and give him Proofs, firſt that it is true, and then that it obliges him to quit our Communion for theirs; this they are ſenſible would be a hopeleſs Undertaking. And therefore very wiſely they are for ſhorter Work, and have general Arguments, it ſeems, to prove that, let their Doc-

Doctrines or ours be what they will, we must be in the wrong, and they in the right.

One of these Arguments is their Infallibility, but this I hope was fully confuted in my first Discourse, and indeed in every one since. For it is in vain for them to pretend they cannot be mistaken, if it appear but in any single Instance that they are.

Another is, that *Protestants*, not being of the *Roman* Church, are not of the Catholic Church: for the Catholic Church is but one, and, out of it, there is no Salvation. Now, we acknowledge it is but one Body under one Head, Christ Jesus; but then in this one Body there are many Members; and why are not the Churches of *Greece*, *Asia*, and *Africa*; why is not ours, as true a Member of it as theirs? On what Authority, if Names were worth disputing about, do they ingross that of *Catholic* to themselves? Do not we profess the true Catholic Faith, that Faith which the Universal Church received from the Apostles? We profess it much purer than they. Are the Sacraments more duly administered by them than by us? Far from it: For of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, one half they have taken away from the Laity; and concerning the other half, they have taught the

the moſt monſtrous Abſurdities, and built on them the moſt ſhocking Idolatry. Then, for that of Baptiſm, we adminiſter it with Water alone, juſt as Chriſt appointed, whereas they have added Oil, Salt, Spittle, and I know not what, as if it were on Purpoſe to make it as unlike his Inſtitution as they can. Is then the Appointment or Ordination of their Clergy more valid, or more regular than ours? On no Account whatever. For if they brought down the Succeſſion uninterrupted to the Reformation, we have certainly preſerved it uninterrupted ſince; which now they may be aſhamed to deny, ſince a learned Man of their own Communion hath fully proved it. And conſequently, for them, who are but a very unſound Part of the Catholic Church, to call themſelves the whole of it, is quite as abſurd, as for a diſeaſed Limb (though perhaps the larger for being diſeaſed) to be called the whole Body. But they will ſay, we ſeparated, and ſo cut off ourſelves from the Catholic Church, at the Reformation. I anſwer, we did not. We only caſt out, as was our Duty, the Errors that were crept in: and we did it by the lawful Authority of our Superiors, both Eccleſiaſtical and Civil. Upon which, the Church of *Rome*, inſtead of imitat-

ing our good Example, commanded all they could influence, to quit our Communion. 'Tis they then who made the Separation, and 'tis they that continue it. We are ready ſtill to join in Communion with them, upon the Terms of the Goſpel: and they refuſe to join with us, but upon Terms of their own deviſing. Now when two Churches break Communion with one another; though it is always a Fault, yet it does not always follow, that either of them is thereby broken off from the Catholic Church, any more than it follows, that when two Men break off Acquaintance, one of them is broken off from the Civil Society to which they belong. But when one Church ſhall excommunicate another, merely becauſe the Governors of that other made ſuch Alterations in it as Scripture warrants, and becauſe the People complied with thoſe Alterations, ſuch an Inſtance of Preſumption and Uncharitableneſs is much more likely to cut off thoſe that uſe it from the Church of Chriſt, than thoſe againſt whom it is uſed. But ſuppoſing we had even acted without, and ſeparated from, our Church Governors, as our Proteſtant Brethren abroad were forced to do: was there not a Cauſe? When the Word of God was hidden from Men, and

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his Worſhip performed in an unknown Tongue; when pernicious Falſehoods were required to be profeſſed, and ſinful Terms of Communion to be complied with; when Church-Authority, by ſupporting ſuch Things as theſe, became inconſiſtent with the Ends for which it was eſtabliſhed: what Remedy was there but to throw it off, and form new Eſtabliſhments? If in theſe there were any Irregularities, they were the Faults of thoſe who forced Men into them; and are of no Conſequence in Compariſon with the Reaſon that made a Change neceſſary. For were a Man to ſeparate himſelf from every Church he knows on Earth, in Order to obey the Laws of Chriſt, he would ſtill be a moſt valuable Member of that *general Aſſembly and Church of the Firſt-born, that are written in Heaven* [a]. *For what Communion hath Light with Darkneſs?——And what Agreement hath the Temple of God with Idols?—Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye ſeparate, ſaith the Lord, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye ſhall be my Sons and Daughters, ſaith the Lord Almighty* [b].

But 'tis an Article of Faith, they tell us, that the Church of *Rome* is the Mother and Miſtreſs of

[a] Heb. xii. 23. [b] 2 Cor. vi. 15, 16, 17, 18.

all Churches, and therefore to caſt off her Authority, can never be lawful. We anſwer, the Mother of all Churches, ſhe certainly is not. For in *Jeruſalem* was the firſt Chriſtian Society, and from thence were derived many others, more ancient than that of *Rome*. Nor was that Church the Mother of the *Britiſh* Churches, nor of all the *Engliſh*. But had the firſt Perſons that founded the Goſpel here been ſent from *Rome*, that had given them no Manner of Authority over us. Whence is ſhe then the Miſtreſs? Why, St. *Peter* was Head of the Church, and the Biſhops of *Rome* are his Succeſſors. But the Scripture tells us, *Chriſt is Head of the Church* [c], and tells us of no other. We own it was ſaid to St. *Peter*, *Upon this Rock will I build my Church* [d]. But this Rock, for ought they can ever prove, might be, not St. *Peter*'s Perſon, but his Confeſſion made immediately before: that *Jeſus was the Chriſt*. Or, if the Church was to be built on St. *Peter*, yet not on him alone, but *upon the Foundation of all the Apoſtles and Prophets*, as St. *Paul* teaches expreſsly [e]. And accordingly, *the Wall of the new Jeruſalem*, or Church of God, is ſaid to *have twelve Foundations*, on which were *the*

[c] Eph. i. 22. iv. 15. [d] Matt. xvi. 18. [e] Eph. ii. 20.

Names

Names of the twelve Apoſtles of the Lamb[f]. To St. *Peter* indeed it was promiſed, *that the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven ſhould be given him*, and that *whatever he bound or looſed on Earth, ſhould be bound or looſed in Heaven*[g]. But this very ſame, and other as great Things, are ſaid to all the Apoſtles equally[h]. St. *Peter* was appointed by Chriſt to *feed his Sheep*[i]: but ſo ſurely was every one of them. The firſt Rank therefore he might have among the Apoſtles; but Authority over them not the leaſt. On the contrary, St. *Paul* tells us, that *he withſtood St. Peter to the Face, becauſe he was to be blamed*[k], and ſays of himſelf, in two different Places, that he was *in nothing behind, not a whit behind, the very chiefeſt Apoſtles*[l]. But had St. *Peter* poſſeſſed ever ſo much Authority, what is that to the Church of *Rome?* Why; St. *Peter* was Biſhop of *Rome*. But even this is what they can never prove, nor is it probable. Or if he was, perhaps it was only of the *Jewiſh* Chriſtians at *Rome*. For St. *Paul* tells us, *the Goſpel of the Uncircumciſion was committed to him, and that of the Circumciſion to Peter*[m];

[f] Rev. xxi. 14. [g] Matt. xvi. 19. [h] Matt. xviii. 18. John xx. 23. [i] John xxi. 15, 16, 17. [k] Gal. ii. 11. [l] 2 Cor. xi. 5. xii. 11. [m] Gal. ii. 7.

and the *Jewiſh* Church there is extinct. Or if Biſhop of all *Rome*, he was Biſhop, they ſay, alſo of *Antioch*; and why muſt their Church inherit his Authority more than that Church? But why indeed muſt it be inherited at all? It was given perſonally to St. *Peter* as an Apoſtle: what had others to do with it who were no Apoſtles, though they did ſucceed him as Biſhops? All Pre-eminence of one Church above another was nothing originally, but an Inſtitution of Men for Convenience and Order. *Rome* being the chief City in the World, it was natural to look on the Biſhop of *Rome* as the chief Biſhop. And Precedence being thus allowed them; by Time and Opportunity, and Arts that were often very wicked ones, they improved it into a Claim of Authority: to which, though not near the whole Church ever ſubmitted, yet at Length a great Part did. Then to the Prerogative, of which they had thus by Degrees got Poſſeſſion, they begun to pretend Chriſt himſelf had originally given them a Right. And having managed ſo well, that Part of the World believed them, and Part durſt not contradict them; they took on them the Title of univerſal Biſhops, which one of themſelves not long before had declared, whoever ſhould take, was

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the Forerunner of Antichriſt. And then under this they claimed all Power over the Souls, Bodies, and Fortunes of Men, and exerciſed it with all poſſible Inſolence, Rapaciouſneſs, Cruelty and Impiety.

Now what could there be done when ſuch a Power was thus acquired, and thus exerciſed, but to throw it off, and aſſert that Liberty to which we had an undoubted Right? For as to any Scheme of coming to Terms, never did the Church of *Rome* recede from any one Pretenſion ſhe ever made. The Exerciſe of Authority ſhe hath omitted indeed, whenever ſhe durſt not exerciſe it: but all her Claims ſhe hath conſtantly kept up, and excommunicates yearly to this Day, every Prince in *Chriſtendom* that ſhall refuſe Obedience to any Conſtitution of the Pope's whatever. 'Tis true, even the *Popiſh* Princes at preſent regard not this Excommunication, and ſhe knows not how to make them regard it. But were once the *Proteſtants* reunited to that Church on the Terms of allowing her any Superiority: who knows how ſoon a Power, that had once riſen from nothing to that formidable Height which it had attained, may riſe again to be as formidable as ever?

Another of their Pleas is this: That which was the ancient Religion and Church muſt be the true one. Now where was your Church, ſay they, before *Henry* the VIIIth? Where was your Religion before *Luther?* We anſwer, our Church was before that Time juſt where it is now. Only then it was corrupted with many ſinful Errors, from which it is now reformed. Still 'tis the ſame Church it was before: juſt as a Man formerly addicted to many Vices, and afflicted with many Diſtempers, continues the ſame Man, after he hath forſaken the one, and recovered from the other; and it would be very ſtrange to make his Alteration for the better an Objection againſt him. And for our Religion: where was that before *Luther?* Why, wherever Chriſtianity was. Did *Luther* invent the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the two Sacraments? Theſe are the Things in which our Religion conſiſts: and theirs conſiſts in the ſame. Only they have added by Degrees, a Number of needleſs, falſe, and wicked Things to them, which we have caſt off again. Our Religion therefore is the ancient Chriſtianity, profeſſed from the Days of the Apoſtles. But where was their Religion in thoſe Days, I mean the Doctrines in which they differ from us?

All

All of them, hundreds of Years later; many of them a thouſand; ſome of them eſtabliſhed no longer ago than the Council of *Trent*, which is ſince the Time of *Luther*. For then, and not before, was it, that they filled up the Meaſure of their Iniquities, which had long been growing; equalled their own Traditions to the Word of God, and added a new Creed to the old one. Our rejecting their additional Doctrines, we own, is new; and no Wonder: for the Doctrines themſelves are new. Some of them indeed reigned much too long: had they been rejected ſooner, it had been the better: but better late than never. Still, our denying theſe, is no more Part of our Religion, properly ſpeaking, than our denying *Mahometaniſm*, or the Idolatry of the *Chineſe*, is Part of our Religion. Were it not for their preſſing them upon us, our People ſhould never hear them mentioned. We take no Pleaſure in expoſing their Abſurdities, but are heartily grieved at them: and have much better Employment for our Hearers than theſe Controverſies, did not their reſtleſs Endeavours to pervert Men, make it ſometimes neceſſary.

But this Plea of their Church being the moſt ancient, they ſometimes put in a different Form:

and tell us, that either the *Romiſh* Church eſtabliſhed here before the Reformation was the true Church, or it was not. If it was, why do we proteſt againſt it? If it was not, how can ours be a true Church, which is derived from it? The Anſwer is very plain. In one Reſpect, as their Church profeſſed the Fundamentals of Chriſtianity, it was, and is a true Church: and ſo far ours is derived from it. In another Reſpect, as it obſcured and contradicted them by unjuſtifiable Doctrines and Practices, it was not a true Church; and ſo far we proteſt againſt it. Their Truths we have preſerved: their Errors we have rejected. In one Senſe we are the ſame Church with them ſtill: in the other we are not the ſame, but a much better.

Another Way which they have of arguing againſt the Reformation, is aſperſing the Characters of thoſe who were engaged in it, and aſcribing bad Motives to them. Now as to this: if the main Thing done was right, as it plainly was, what Sort of Inſtruments God employed in it, or what their perſonal Inducements were, is of no Conſequence to us in the leaſt. *Jehu* was an Inſtrument of God in deſtroying *Baal* out of *Iſrael*, and executing Vengeance on the Houſe of *Ahab*: yet very wicked in ſome Reſpects.

pects [n]. So was *Henry* the VIIIth commendable in deſtroying the Supremacy of the Pope, yet highly blameable in other Things. The greateſt Part of the Reformers were very good Men, and acted from the beſt of Motives. Some of them had doubtleſs great Faults, and might act from bad Motives. Nay, ſuch as meant very well, might, in particular Things, do very ill. For what conſtantly happened in all other Caſes, no Wonder if it happened in this. However, the moſt blameable were not near ſo bad, as the Malice of their Adverſaries repreſents them: and had they been much worſe, yet they could ſcarce poſſibly be ſo bad as ſome of thoſe Princes, and even of thoſe Popes were, who built up the Antichriſtian Power, which theſe Men demoliſhed.

But whatever becomes of this Compariſon, ſtill, upon the whole, theirs is the Church, they tell us, in which the moſt numerous and brighteſt Inſtances of Devotion, Self-denial, and good Works, have ſhone forth, as the many Hiſtories of their Saints fully prove: ours is a low, carnal Religion; moſt of our People are very bad, few or none of them eminently good: and that muſt be the beſt Church, which makes

[n] 2 Kings x. 28—31.

the

the beſt Men. Now the Truth is, theſe magnified Inſtances of Piety of theirs, are moſt of them Inſtances only of mere Superſtition, or blind Zeal: and the Saints, which they have canonized, were, many of them, very weak, and ſome of them, very wicked Perſons, whoſe Lives are pompouſly dreſſed up in Legends and Fables, to amuſe and miſlead the Ignorant. We, for our Parts, leave them to make a Noiſe with fanciful Ways of being religious; and doubt not, but we pleaſe God much better by performing quietly the real Duties of Life. And, though we acknowledge and lament that a Failure in theſe is too general amongſt us, yet we muſt remind them, when they inſult us upon this, that there is no where on Earth more vile and more open Wickedneſs, than where Popery reigns without Controul. If, when they live under Proteſtant Governments, they live in a more Chriſtian Manner, we are heartily glad of it. But ſtill we hope, even here the Lives of our People are not worſe than theirs: and we are ſure it is not the Fault of our Religion, if they are not much better.

But, they tell us, however theſe Things may be, yet their Communion is undoubtedly the ſafer of the two. For they ſay we cannot be ſaved,

ſaved, and we own they may be ſaved: and that Church is plainly the ſafer, in which both Sides acknowledge Salvation is to be had. But conſider: does their ſaying we are not ſafe, make us ever the leſs ſo in Reality? The Queſtion is, Upon what Grounds do they ſay it? Why, upon none at all, as I have ſhown you. And therefore all they can prove by ſaying it, is their own Confidence, of which thoſe Perſons have generally the moſt, who have the leaſt Reaſon for it: and their own Uncharitableneſs, for which, if we at all underſtand Chriſtianity, no Side will ever be the ſafer. Well: but we do not deny, that they may be ſaved. No more do I or they deny, but even a virtuous Heathen may have ſome Degree of Happineſs in another Life. Suppoſe then he ſhould take it into his Head to deny that a Chriſtian could, muſt I turn Heathen to be of the ſafer Side? You ſee it is juſt the ſame Caſe. But after all, do we lay it down as a Rule without Exception, that all Papiſts may be ſaved? We dare not ſay ſo. Some of them go much more unjuſtifiable Lengths than others: the ill Things that many of them do, they do in Ignorance: this, we hope, will be an Excuſe for them in a great Meaſure. Yet, even for the moſt ignorant, their

their Salvation is grievouſly hazardous, amidſt ſo many Corruptions, which, one ſhould think, even They might perceive to be ſuch, and ſo many Temptations to neglect that *Holineſs, without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord*[o]. The Condition of the learned amongſt them, who, when the Light is before their Eyes, continue in Darkneſs and keep others in it, is ſtill more dangerous. But in the worſt State of all are they, who being born *Children of Light*, return to Darkneſs again; and ſin wilfully after they have been bred up amongſt us in the Knowledge of the Truth. Yet even among theſe there are very different Degrees of Guilt. Such whoſe good Meaning hath been miſled by plauſible Artifices, we would ſtill hope well of: though doubtleſs they muſt have been ſinfully negligent of informing themſelves concerning the Grounds of their firſt Belief; elſe they had never left it. A ſecond Sort, who depart from what, in their Conſciences, they believe is the Truth, merely becauſe a preſumptuous Man tells them they cannot be ſaved if they adhere to it, theſe are much more blameworthy than the former. But for ſuch as, either from the Love of worldly Intereſt, or the wretched Hope

[o] Heb. xii. 14.

of reconciling Sin and Salvation together, turn aſide from the Way of Righteouſneſs, and forſake that pure and holy Communion, which the good Providence of God had placed them in; as to ſuch, we cannot judge favourably, and we will not judge hardly; *there is one that judgeth* [p], *who will alſo render to every Man according to his Deeds* [q]: but indeed we can ſee no Promiſe of their finding *Mercy in that Day*. Suffer not yourſelves then to be moved either by vain Threatenings or falſe Promiſes, nor ever think to be ſafe in any other Way, than that of firſt inquiring carefully, what your Duty is; and then keeping cloſe to the Practice of it. Be aſſured it is ſafe to worſhip God, through Jeſus Chriſt, and let all other Worſhip alone; ſafe to receive the holy Communion as our Lord himſelf gave it, to pray in a Language you all underſtand; and make that holy Word *which was written for your Learning* [r], the Foundation and Rule of your Faith, your Practice, and your Hopes. Fear not but you are ſafe in doing thus; whether the *Romaniſts* be ſafe in doing otherwiſe or not. God grant they may! but God forbid that any of us ſhould try. Bear with me now but a few Minutes longer,

[p] John viii. 50. [q] Rom. ii. 6. [r] Rom. xv. 4.

whilſt

whilſt I give you in Concluſion ſome ſeaſonable Directions for your Behaviour towards thoſe of that Church.

Firſt then let none of their bad Doctrines or Practices ever tempt you in the leaſt to any hard Treatment of them, any Incivility or ſecret Ill-will towards them. Juſtice and Mercy, Equity and Charity, are main Parts of Religion: and a Failure in theſe is one of the worſt Hereſies into which we can fall. We know the Church of *Rome* hath failed in them greatly; our Anceſtors have felt their Cruelty; our Proteſtant Brethren abroad groan under it at this Day, and may God preſerve us and our Poſterity from the Danger of it; for never had they Mercy long when they had Power. Careful Self-Defence againſt ſuch a Spirit muſt be allowed us: but, as to any Thing farther, in thoſe Things for which we blame them, let us not be like them. The ſevere Laws we have in Force againſt them are not for their religious Opinions; but for their refuſing to own, and promiſe due Obedience to, the Government under which they live: and they have long Experience that nothing but abſolute Neceſſity will ever oblige our Superiors to put any of theſe Laws into Execution. Let us therefore ſhew in our private Ca-

pacities the ſame good Temper. As Men, they have a Title to all Humanity: as Chriſtians, though miſtaken, they have a yet ſtronger Claim to our Forbearance and Tenderneſs. Their Doctrines indeed are dangerous; their Practices have been dreadful: but this, in a great Meaſure, hath ariſen from Ignorance, and *a Zeal of God, though not according to Knowledge* [s]. Numbers of them, without Doubt, inwardly diſapprove religious Cruelties, and think at leaſt they could never be brought to join in them. However this may be, (which God forbid ſhould ever come to be tried) yet in the mean Time nothing hinders but as in Religion they may, to the beſt of their Judgement, be ſincerely pious, ſo in common Life they may be juſt and honeſt, friendly and neighbourly. Let us therefore, with much better natured Principles, be ſure not to appear worſe natured Perſons; but recommend our Profeſſion to all the World by that *Wiſdom which is from above, firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle and eaſy to be intreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits* [t].

In the next Place, let nothing which hath been ſaid make thoſe, who are not ſome Way called to it, over forward to diſpute about theſe

[s] Rom. x. 2. [t] James iii. 17.

Matters

Matters with Perſons of more Learning and Art than themſelves. For a Man may have very good Reaſons on his Side, and yet be ſo little qualified to ſet them in the beſt Light, that an excellent Cauſe may be hurt by Want of Skill in managing it. What I have endeavoured is only that you may *be able*, as St. *Peter* directs, *to give an Anſwer to them that aſk you a Reaſon of the Hope that is in you*[u]. In doing which, remember you are concerned only to be on the defenſive. They are to prove, if they can, that every one of their Doctrines is not only true, but an Article of Faith, and every one of their Practices not only lawful, but neceſſary. Till they have done all this, you have no Reaſon to change: and when they have done it, we allow you to change. But obſerve one Thing: if you hear them deny any of the Points with which they have been charged, do not be ſtaggered at it. Would to God they were not guilty of them! They would be more in the right, and we ſhould be never the leſs ſo. But do not think a Charge unjuſt, becauſe they confidently ſay it is. The more ignorant of them here among us, perhaps, do not know the worſt Part of their Doctrines: and the more

[u] 1 Pet. iii. 15.

learned

learned will not own them till they are forced. Theſe Concealments are no new Things with them. In ſome Countries many of their Miſſionaries have concealed a great Part of the Chriſtianity they pretended to teach, and allowed Heatheniſm to be blended with it in order to make Converts, ſuch as they are, the more eaſily. No Wonder then if here they veil over their Corruptions with a fair Maſk, which, if we do not pull off, they will not throw off, till the proper Time comes.

Another Thing is, If ever you ſhould be preſſed with any of their Arguments which I have mentioned, and not perhaps remember the Anſwer to it, ſtill remember you have heard it anſwered: and any one of you may, at any Time when you deſire it, have the Anſwer repeated and farther explained to you. Or if any other Argument ſhould be uſed, to which you cannot of yourſelves reply, conſult thoſe that can: tell us your Difficulties in Time; be aſſured ſuch as would keep you from this do not mean honeſtly; give us but a fair hearing before you determine to leave us, and we doubt not your ſtaying with us. Even if any of you ſhould be unhappily brought to think favourably of ſome of their Doctrines, remember ſtill how

monſtrous others of them are: and yet, if you do not ſwallow all, you have done nothing. We allow Perſons to have very different Opinions from us in ſome Points, and ſuffer them to continue among us as very good Chriſtians notwithſtanding: but their Church makes no Abatement: their very groſſeſt Errors muſt be profeſſed, or you are none of them. Think well then what you do: and, as I once adviſed before, never let Subtlety and Sophiſtry, whether you know exactly how to anſwer it or not, prevail againſt Scripture and Reaſon; but ever ſtick to the plain Word of God, and plain common Senſe.

One Direction more I have of the utmoſt Importance; which is, if ever we would ſecure ourſelves to good Purpoſe againſt the Dangers of falſe Religion, let us carefully promote the Profeſſion and Practice of the true. If Perſons are bred up in no Knowledge of, and no Zeal for, the Principles of their own Church, no Wonder that they are eaſily carried off and ſeduced into another. If they are encouraged to live without Regard to God, many of them however will be afraid to die ſo too; and then that Communion, which makes the largeſt Promiſes of Forgiveneſs on the eaſieſt Terms, will be almoſt

moſt ſure to be embraced by them. Men, wiſe in their own Imaginations, think they are ſure to root out Superſtition, if they plant Infidelity. But Mankind muſt and will have ſome Religion; and if they forſake a good one, ſooner or later the Uncomfortableneſs of Unbelief, and the Terrors of Conſcience after a wicked Life, will drive moſt of them to a worſe. Beſides, whilſt we are divided and negligent about theſe Matters, the Emiſſaries of the Church of *Rome* are united and active, and never with more ſanguine Hopes, than when they can plead Experience, that the Liberty allowed by the Proteſtant Religion leads Men of Courſe to throw off all Religion. Theſe are plain Reaſons for a public Regard to Piety and Virtue: and there are yet more important ones for a private conſcientious Practice of them: for that, after all, is the only Thing that will eſtabliſh us in the Truth, fill our Hearts with Peace and Comfort in this Life, and give us everlaſting Happineſs in the next. If then you have any Concern either for the Honour of that Church to which you belong, for the Welfare of your Country, or the Salvation of your Souls, *let your Converſation be as becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt* [w]. Pity and

[w] Phil. i. 27.

pray

pray for them who are in Error, that God would *give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth*[x], *and building up yourselves*, as St. *Jude* exhorts, *on your most holy Faith, keep yourselves in the Love of God; looking for the Mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal Life*[y].

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the Presence of his Glory with exceeding Joy, to the only wise God our Saviour be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, both now and ever. Amen[z].

[x] 2 Tim. ii. 25. [y] Jude, ver. 20, 21. [z] Jude, ver. 24, 25.

END of VOL. VI.

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